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UNDER THE PALMS

IN

ALGERIA AND TUNIS.

VOL. II.

BISKRA.

UNDER THE PALMS

IN

ALGERIA AND TUNIS.

2483

OULAD-NAYL.

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BY

THE HON. LEWIS WINGFIELD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CONTENTS

OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.

CHAPTER XII.

Philipville—Hôtel d'Orient—Visit to the Archæological Museum—Our Cicerone—Ruins of the Roman Amphitheatre—Reservoirs of the Town—Irrigation—Great Undertaking—Sum spent in Algerian Railways—Railway along the North African Coast—Aspect of the Country—Remarkable River—Extraordinary Appearance of the Women—Iron Bridge over the Roumel—Magnificent View of Constantine—Approach to the City—Curious Appearance of the Natives—Waiting for the Evening Gun . 3

CHAPTER XIII.

Batna to Biskra—Hôtel des Colonies—Ride in a Bus—Lambèse—Relics of Antiquity—In Search of the Picturesque—Lions and Panthers—Cedars—Hill Tribes—The Steed of the Desert—Departure from Batna—Inn of El-Kantara—Precipitous Gorge—Oasis of El-Kantara—Gardens—A Sheikh's Washing—General Salutation—Arab Village—Roman Remains—New Road—A Sorry Vehicle—El-Outaia—Barren Plains—The Great Sahara—Biskra—Hôtel de Sahara 13

CHAPTER XIV.

Biskra—Face of the Sahara—Oulad Nayls—Their Costume —Arab Acrobats— A Lunatic—Negro Festivals—Jewesses—The Date Palm—Irrigation—Dates—Old Biskra —A Military Cicerone—The Cypress—Hunting Grounds of Ouargla—Ostrich Hunting—Murders—Particulars relating to the Ostrich—Biskra after Dark—A Café—Kabyle Dancers—Opium Smokers—Picturesque Group—Experiment in Locomotion—Ride on a Camel—Dismounting—The Desert—Our Guides—Residence of a Sheikh—Night in the Desert—Pépinière de Beni-Mora —Plague of Grasshoppers—The Touaregs—Wonderful Specimen of the Oulad Nayls 38

CHAPTER XV.

Cotton in the Sahara—Visit to the Commandant Supérieur of the Bureau Arabe—Military Quarrels—Stalwart Natives—Visit to M. Dufourg—Cultivation of Cotton—Scarcity of Water—Fabulous Prices paid for it—Blind Policy of Government—System of Repression—The Fremy-Talabot Contract—M. Dufourg's Prospects—His Limited Experience—Export of Cotton from Egypt—Cotton grown by M. Dufourg—The Commencement and Progress of his Business—The Cotton Season—Cleaning Machinery—Expenses—M. Dufourg's Letter to the Author 87

CHAPTER XVI.

Plains of the Hodna—Scene of Desolation—False Alarm—Unpleasant Memorials—Mdoucal—Tedious Ordeal—Quicksands—Dangerous Tribes—Sand and Bog—Sheikh Baleuti—An Arab Peculiarity—Extract from

Government Report—The Barika—Gentlemen of the Road—A Sheikh's Encampment—Arab Etiquette—Up in the Morning—Wild Game—A New Sensation—A Doubtful Welcome—Weird Scene—Night in an Arab Tent—Visit to M. Jus—Model Encampment—State of the Country—Excellent Breakfast—Msila—Officers of the Bureaux Arabes 101

CHAPTER XVII.

Msila to Algiers—Population of Msila—Anecdote—Marriage and Divorce—Game—Limitation of the Tribes—A Prophecy and Revolt—Mineral Productions—Bordj-bou-Areridj—Abd-el-Kader—Extent of his Power—The Emir in Disgrace—Travelling Difficulties—Taking the Law into our own Hands—Interior of an Arab Tent—Serious Illness—The "Grand Porte"—Protection against Lions—Scène of Horror—Beni-Mansour—Sport—Ambulance Mules—Bouira—Again in the Saddle—Dra-el-Mizan—A Dilemma 137

CHAPTER XVIII.

Journey through the Western Province—Orphanage of Ben-Alloun—Blida—The "Bois Sacré"—Signs of the Late Earthquake—La Chiffa—Up the Stream—The Five Cascades—Miliana—Destitution— Crops—The Cemetery—Touching Memorials—Excursion—Wild Glen—Forest Lands—Incendiarism—Government and Colonists—Thuya Tree—Teniet-al-Had—Change of Climate—The Hill Country—Rich Vegetation—Our Guide—Arab Tale—Forest of Teniet-al-Had—Mineral Springs—Procession of a Douar—Visit to our "Cocher" . . . 173

CHAPTER XIX.

Province of Oran—Mineral Wealth—Population—Commerce—Mostaganem—Native Children—Plague of Grasshoppers—Spaniards in Oran—Native Hovels—Colony of Charcoal - Burners—Extraordinary Houses—Arbal—French Hospitality—Model Farm—Merino Sheep—Ruins of a Roman Town—Pretty Garden—A Jolly Life—The Oldest Colonist—Reckless Settlers—Colonial Management—Land—Wages—Labour—Complaints of Colonists—Agricultural Prosperity—Rural Life—Usine d'Egrainage—Cotton-Growing—Cleaning Machines—The Reservoir—Water Tax—Night Journey in a Diligence—Tlemcen—Ride through the Town—Striking Scene—Magnificent Relic—Children in the Street—The Great Mosque—Sidi-bou-Medin—Tomb of the Recluse—A Schoolmaster and his Class—Plains of the Isser—Town and Country—Last Solitary Walk—Dreadful *Vacarme*—Eastern Phlegm—A Common Occurrence—French Dominion—Maladministration—Distribution of Property—Colonization—The Army—Situation of Affairs—Military Government 214

PART III.

The Great Sahara Desert.

CHAPTER XII.

PHILIPVILLE.

IN the course of the night of the 1st of February, we arrived at Stora, which is the Arab village hanging to the skirts of European Philipville. It is a pretty little place, embosomed in trees, close to the water's edge. Philipville is about three miles distant, and is the colonial town and port. When I say port, I should say landing-place, as there is no port to speak of, only a few rickety stairs, which, in rough weather, are covered by the waves. A port is to be built shortly, they say, and then great things are expected; but I fear this is only another of the *Châteaux en Espagne* in which Algeria is so rich.

Philipville is the Russicada of the Romans, and was a bishopric of the early Church, and consequently of considerable size and importance. Half

of the original site is now submerged, as is proved by the fact that in days of storm coins and other relics are found in quantities on the beach. Marshal Valée, at the time of the conquest, felt anxious to give Constantine a fit opening to the sea, and laid the foundations of the Fort de France close to the ruins of Russicada. A town soon rose around the fort, through the necessities of commerce, and this town was called, after Louis Philippe, *Philipville*. It is a nice town enough, adorned with squares, and *cafés*, and arcades. The population consists of about 9,000 inhabitants, of which 1,300 are Anglo-Maltese; 400 are Spaniards, and the remainder Aborigines.

We put up at the Hôtel d'Orient, a howlish and dilapidated place; bad food, bad rooms, and no water. There had been no rain for eight months in this neighbourhood, and consequently there was a great dearth of that commodity. The taps and fountains in the town were only allowed to flow during two hours every day, and crowds might have been seen bearing pitchers, awaiting the happy moment, like the lame of Bethesda pool.

After breakfast we managed to find our way to the Archæological Museum, where we expected to be enabled to judge of the importance of the ancient remains. M. Roger, the antiquarian, was not at home, but a wonderfully absurd little tailor threw down his scissors and offered to act as *cicerone* to the ruins. A little snuffy, fluffy old man, with long, dry, iron-grey hair and seamed visage, a large battered wide-awake hat, and the whole of his diminutive person compressed into a tight black coat, and seedy, shiny, baggy continuations of the same. He chirped pleasantly as he went along, and bobbed and strutted with all the importance of a very small bird. He was delighted with everything, and evidently a philosopher.

"Sapristi!—Africa was a charming climate—no winter, no cold." The Midi de la France was very nice, but nothing to these bright skies. He explained to us the statues that lay about, examining a Pomona with critical eye, frowning sententiously on her the while, the little twittering head well on one side.

"That, you see, is a fruit-woman; there weren't many found like her. Yonder is Cæsar, a Roman, I believe, but the Arabs—devil take them!—knocked off his nose. There are the tombs in which they were buried, these men of long ago. Ah! they were clever fellows! Look at the bricks all crumbling in decay, while the mortar stands the weather bravely still. Come and walk up here and see the Circus. What big stones they used, and here they are yet, though the hands that placed them have long since passed away. *Tonnerre*, but it is wonderful!"

He led us about, and showed off to the best advantage the ruins of the Roman Amphitheatre. It is not half excavated yet, though much in the way of mosaic and inscription has been borne away to Paris. At this juncture the little man left us, nodding pleasant smiles, and waving his thimbled forefinger, hoped we should enjoy the sunshine. We watched him tripping down the path, carolling back to his work; and turning, saw M. Roger approaching us, whom a fortunate chance had brought back to do the honours of the

Museum. A great quantity of coins and bracelets and inscriptions were all heaped up anyhow in a long low room; among them an interesting Roman "Ex Voto," consisting of a pair of feet cut roughly in a marble slab, showing that there is indeed nothing new under the sun! We thanked him for his courtesy, and bade him farewell, and he directed us to the summit of the hill, where we found a custode, who showed us over the reservoirs of the town—now nearly empty. They are interesting, as having been the original Roman ones, lately restored, and are nine in number, each of them about fifty yards long by forty in depth—yawning, cavernous places, endowed with an echo like a clap of thunder. Our custode sang in a full bass voice a few fragments of French romances, and it was very pleasant to listen to the way the sound was taken up, and repeated and re-echoed to infinity. Through the opening into these vaults we had a lovely glimpse of deep blue sea, with lateen sails flitting over its surface, and of distant shadowy hills.

We started at dawn on the 24th, in a private

carriage, all our own; which consisted of an unwieldy trap, whose business it was to carry letters. We made ourselves very comfortable, however, bivouacking on the roof, and sending the "thorn" to dowager inside. Rain had not fallen here for the last eight months, and yet the fields looked perfectly green, and wheat showed signs of an abundant crop under the vivifying influence of copious night-dews. The want of irrigation around the actual towns of Constantine and Philipville will soon be remedied by means of aqueducts and an iron pipe, two feet in diameter, which will draw water from the neighbouring range of mountains. This work is in able hands, and will soon be completed, they say. Is it another château? The Government agents compare this country to an estate on which much money has been spent, the fruits of which expenditure are not yet visible: meaning, I suppose, that all will come right suddenly by magic. I hope it may be so, though the suggestion looks very like an excuse for dilatoriness and culpable delay. It must be confessed, however, that more activity is now

being exercised in public works, as an example of which may be cited that of the new railway between Constantine and Philipville, which will be completed in about two years. It is a dreadful undertaking, as the whole length of road is made up of hills and valleys, necessitating embankments and endless tunnels. £970,000 are said to have been already spent on Algerian railways, though there is as yet nothing to show whatever. The plan on which they are supposed to be working is that of having a central line or "back-bone" of railroad communication running along the coast, from which at some future time branch lines may be made intersecting the country as far as shall be considered necessary.*

* The following appeared in an English newspaper, dated the 6th of March, 1867 :—

"PROPOSED LINE OF RAILWAY ALONG THE NORTH AFRICAN COAST.—M. A. Blancho, a member of the Council-General of the province of Oran, makes a proposal which, if carried out, will deprive the English and Mediterranean Steamship Company of an immense amount of Levant traffic. M. A. Blancho advises, both on economical and political grounds, the importance of a railway all along the north coast of Africa from Alexandria to Tangier. He says :—'In order to counterbalance the transit of her steamers, France will re-

The aspect of the country between Philipville and Constantine is mountainous, more grassy than rocky, with a superabundance of rushes and red lilies. Near the village of Hamma we came upon a novel scene—a rushing river of warm sulphureous waters, in which were bathing a group of dusky natives. The women presented an extraordinary appearance, their heads only appearing above the surface of the water, with two enormous silver rings in each ear, which as they moved flapped about like the head of a lop-eared rabbit. Further on the same river is made to turn a multitude of

quire a railway starting from Alexandria, passing through Tunis, Constantine, Algiers, Oran, &c., to be pushed later on as far as Tangier. A railway to Tangier places America, Spain, and Portugal in communication with Suez, and the vessels from India, in sixty hours. Oran at eight hours from Europe becomes the centre of Northern Africa, and acquires a special position on the Mediterranean, on account of its two harbours—Mers-el-Kebir and Oran. I do not see the possibility of competing with the English otherwise than by co-operative societies organized in the tribes, jointly with free trade. Whichever may be the means to employ the natives, there can be no doubt that there will be plenty of work in the construction of the proposed railway.' By this peaceful innovation upon the habits of the African tribes, M. Blancho believes that France will gain

flour-mills, and its irrigation produces an oasis of luxurious foliage—great spreading palms and delicate bananas, together with the park and hedge-row cultivation of midland Europe.

A few more miles brought us to an iron bridge over the river Roumel, and from this point we gained a magnificent view of Constantine, much finer than that obtained from the Sétif road—a foreground of water, and reckless abandon of bramble and cactus, while the town rises on two thousand feet of beetling cliff, surrounded by the deep shadow of a dark ravine. We were now given an extra horse to aid in dragging us up the

Morocco by the "economical war." Should the railway along the northern coast of Africa be completed, the steamers trading up the Mediterranean from Gibraltar and other ports of call will lose a large quantity of passenger freight, or "pilgrim money," every year from the Mahometans, who generally visit the tomb of the prophet at Mecca, taking the railway instead of the steamers. A large decrease will also be caused in the extensive mortality which always prevails amongst the pilgrims to Mecca on board ship, where they generally lie on deck, exposed to the heat of daytime and penetrating cold in the night. France, however, will eventually reap a rich harvest should the plan so plausibly proposed by M. Blancho meet the approbation of the Emperor of the French."

steep ascent. As we neared the town we were attracted by the busy running to and fro of natives on the bare brown slopes. I was irresistibly struck with their resemblance to the anxious, unsteady motion of ants when disturbed in their labours. Outside the arches of the "Porte" were clustered many of the white-robed, all impatiently awaiting the evening gun, that should free them for the day from the irksome fast of the Ramadan. We rattled into the great square, drew up with a jerk at the door of the diligence-office, and were speedily surrounded by an odoriferous group with dusky faces and ragged limbs, who crowded round, and stared as though a European were a very unusual apparition.

CHAPTER XIII.

BATNA TO BISKRA.

WE thought it prudent to remain a day at Constantine, in order to lay in a stock of provisions, potted meats, &c., in case of any sudden run into the desert. We therefore started by the evening diligence, which landed us at Batna at eight the next morning. It is a wretched-looking barren spot, some 3,349 feet above sea-level, containing a population of 2,500 people, who appear very miserable. It has wide, howling streets, with comfortless, empty houses. Of these the Hôtel des Colonies was the most forbidding, and turned out quite unnaturally terrible. They gave us scanty food of the very worst description, put us up in rooms that were the abode of all the draughts under heaven, and charged us Paris prices. But

that is always the way, the worse the article the more you are expected to pay for it. The Hôtel de France, they say, is very good. At any rate, nothing could be worse than the accommodation, as well as the boorish incivility, we met with at "Les Colonïes."

After a nasty breakfast, we chartered a 'bus, in common with another English party, to convey us to the ruins of Lambèse, said to be three miles outside the town. For this 'bus we were charged inordinately, and dragged our weary length along in a generally hopeless and desponding manner, the horses being dead-beat, and quite beyond either threats or cajolement. In vain the driver kicked and swore, in vain he aimed at the sores on the poor beasts' backs with his cruel lash, hoping by this means to stir them into activity; do what he would he could not get up more than a jog-trot, which subsided into a walk every now and then. An English lady inside expostulated loudly at the cruelty to animals, and finally got out and walked, rather than countenance such a transaction. It was a dreary affair altogether, dark lowering clouds

half shutting out the hills, which are arid, and not inviting. In the neighbourhood of the town there is but little cultivation, great tracts of waste, with here and there a tuft of grass, but nothing anywhere approaching to the dignity of a shrub.

Arrived at the modern village of Lambèse, we hired a boy to do the honours of the place, and he carried us off up a rocky hill to the ruins of the Temple of Æsculapius. Rather a pretty group of marble steps and overturned columns have been buried in weeds and grass-tufts. On glancing over the plain, shut in as it is by barren hills, the eye detects here the ruin of a temple, or there the arch of an aqueduct, which mark the original extent of the city. It must have been a large town, for remains can be traced of forty gates, and it was the head-quarters of the third Roman Legion, who were placed there to protect North Africa against the incursions of the Numidians. How they ever came to settle themselves in so unlikely a spot it is difficult to imagine—a barren country, arid hills, with little water, and the whole neighbourhood rendered, by its lack of population, a fitting home for

savage beasts. In that respect it is the same now as it was then, being infested with lions and panthers, hyenas and tiger-cats, lynxes and ichneumons, foxes and tapes, porcupines and wild boars.

I have heard the ruins of Lambèse compared with those of Pompeii, but am forced to say that there is no possibility of comparison whatever. We saw the remains of a house half excavated, the mosaics in whose atrium are well preserved, while its walls bear indistinct traces of ancient frescoes. This may be all very well for travellers new to such relics of antiquity, but for those who remember Pompeii's long paved streets, and the house of Diomed, the whole thing is a delusion and a snare. A few statues are collected in a sort of museum near the entrance of the town, but all of them are in the most degenerate style of art, and no more worthy of a visit than the place itself. We mounted the box of our vehicle in great disgust, and crawled back to Batna. Its uncomfortable aspect struck me more than ever as we re-entered its inhospitable gates, the cold wind rushing down its yawning thoroughfares, the

low rampart and dyke which surrounded the town, as well as the small one-storied houses in its streets, giving the whole thing an aspect of insignificance unpleasant to behold. It contains a garrison of 2,000 men, besides the number of civilians mentioned above; and a real place of banishment it must truly be to the gay and pleasure-loving Frenchman!

Thoroughly deceived by the Roman ruins, we still resolved to persevere in the search after the picturesque, and started off on the following morning on mule-back to visit the forest of cedars, situated a few miles among the mountains. In course of time we traversed the monotonous plain, and began to ascend the hills. They looked blue and hazy in the distance, but do not bear near inspection, being very barren and brown; the roads, too, are bad, leading over sloshy swamps and broken rocks. Half-way up the first mountain we met a Frenchman, who strongly advised us to proceed no further, the snows having driven the lions from their usual haunts nearer to the abodes of man. We were told, indeed, that they

frequently prowl round the town, and have even been known, in very hard winters, to penetrate within the fosse and wall, and wander through the streets! A farmer told us that he was one night returning from a visit in the country, and suddenly came on two lions, male and female, who were taking a stroll in the moonlight, not twenty paces from him—he remained quite still, and they moved away. The lion's mode of securing his prey is curious, and, though sounding rather fabulous, is true nevertheless. Having seized a firm hold of the back of his intended victim, he lashes himself with his powerful tail into a gallop, and thus bears the terrified animal to a convenient spot, where he rends and devours him at leisure. He will never attack a man unless driven to do so by hunger, as his predilections lie more in the way of the inferior animals than of human beings. A panther, on the contrary, will spring upon you out of sheer malice, and is therefore a much more unpleasant beast to meet.

On the present occasion we made up our minds to proceed, and risk a danger which seemed to us

chimerical. Slowly we wound up the hill, over the brow of the first range, down into the valley, and up again, a toilsome way, over the next and highest ridge. We were met every now and then by a few mules laden with planks of cedar, that nearly forced us out of the path with their unwieldy length, and gave out pleasant whiffs of perfume as we went by. These are not the sweet brown cedars so much valued for cabinet-work, but a white wood, used here for building, and possessing a "cedary" odour, not quite so powerful as in the forests of Lebanon or Teniet-al-Had.

Arrived at the top of the mountain, we expected the forest to break upon our view in all the grandeur of its primeval monarchs, instead of which there were only a few scrubby trees, and some half-sawn planks lying about. The large roots that peeped out everywhere showed that the forest had indeed existed *once*, but was now no more—at any rate, in a picturesque point of view. We were much disappointed, and vented our ill-humour on the unfortunate guides, until at length calm reason triumphed, and we consoled ourselves

with comforting reflections on the beauty of the day and the balmy freshness of the air.

As we wound down the hill again on our homeward route, we had the entire plain stretched out before us, with snow-capped mountains beyond. It certainly is a frightful country, and quite remarkable for the thinness of its population. With a powerful opera-glass we could only distinguish two habitations on the whole expanse that lay thus mapped out. Batna itself is built in regular squares, and resembles from these heights a gigantic sheep-fold. The tribes inhabiting the hills are great breeders of horses, and produce an animal of the Arab race, which is exceedingly pretty, but rather weak in the shoulder. The horses bred in the mountains are much better than those of the plains, being more robust, and not so dainty as to food. Besides this, they are wonderfully sure of foot—a great deal more so, indeed, than the much-vaunted mules. There is an average of one hundred and fifty thousand horses in Algeria. The horses far away in the Sahara again, are of superior quality to those of the Tell (whether of

the mountains or the plains), and are identified with almost all the actions of their masters.

The celebrated steed of the desert, the glory of ancient Numidia, is remarkable for the beauty of its form, the rapidity of its course, and the promptitude with which it interprets the smallest wishes of its master. According to Arab judges, it should possess the qualities of the hare, the pigeon, and the mahari, or swiftly-trotting camel. They say that a perfect animal is *wide* in three of its parts—the forehead, the chest, and the limbs; *long* in three of its parts—the neck, the belly, and the haunches; *short* in three of its parts —the ears, the pasterns, and the tail.*

In 1844 there was an alarm of the race dying out, so a *depôt* of stallions was established by Government in each of the three provinces; and in 1851 the entire system was re-organized, and placed under the charge of an experienced officer. So great was the apathy of the natives themselves, and their indifference to the degeneration of their horses, that they refused to make use of the advan-

* "Chevaux du Sahara." Par le Général Daumas.

tage prepared for them, until a premium was offered for the best yearling mare and foal in each province. Equine affairs are now in a flourishing condition again, thanks to General Daumas and Marshal Randon.

We were by this time quite rabid to leave Batna behind us, and were much dismayed, on a visit to the diligence office, to find all the places taken. It was utterly impossible to remain in so dreadful a place; so, in answer to our urgent entreaties, the *chef* of the bureau promised to manage for us somehow, if we would promise to be at the office punctually by 4 A.M., the settled time for starting. We were there accordingly, only too anxious to get away, which was proved by the fact that rather than remain where we were, we submitted to the indignity of being packed up along with the luggage, and stowed away in the place usually allotted to the banquette, lying all in heaps anyhow, our bones broken by the sharp edges of boxes and imperials, each jolt bringing in its train its own peculiar series of agonies. This state of things went on for six hours, while we traversed a

country that increased gradually in barrenness, and ended at last in sandy earth and rocks, with no green tree, or bough, or shrub. Roads there might just as well be none; it would be impossible to distinguish them from the surrounding desolation, were it not for the deep holes and ruts which tell of former carriage traffic. Now we dip into a rut, now struggle up a precipitous incline, and splash through a stony watercourse; our joints are dislocated by swaying shocks and jolts; the driver sits on my legs, or barks my shins with the handle of his whip, or helps himself straight, after a more than usually desperate jerk, by means of my already aching shoulder. Suddenly a severe lurch dances all the boxes out of their places on to our fingers—a sharp turn of the road, and, Heaven be praised! the neat little inn of El-Kantara, where we are to sojourn for the next two days!

A clean little inn, with tidy trellised porch and garden railings, and fowls and turkeys clucking round the door; a comely damsel smiling a welcome on "Messieurs les Voyageurs;" breakfast

ready at once, ere the diligence toils onward with its heavy freight to Biskra.

We get out and stretch ourselves as well as mangled limbs and aching bones will permit, and look around us in anticipation of the speedy departure of the convenience, leaving us to the solitary enjoyment of the inn. We are in the opening of a winding gorge of red precipitous crags, utterly inaccessible, I should imagine, to the human foot, a home for vultures and gazelles, and a breeding-place for eagles. Not a sign of a green thing wherever the eye reposes. Reposes I should not say, for it is impossible that the eye should repose in such cruelly glaring heat. A few of the white-robed follow us about, and offer tamarinds for sale —there is a general clatter of voices, and of knives and forks, and the horses are put to. Messieurs les Voyageurs are unceremoniously bundled into their places, the driver cracks his whip, and the horses shake their bells. Allez! crack—the great unwieldy monster sways and groans, and is off; we are left alone with the brawling waters and the melancholy cliffs—in peace!

We got through a nasty breakfast of garlic and beef, garlic and chicken, garlic and everything else, and sallied forth to see the Oasis of El-Kantara, lying just out of sight beyond the cliffs, the entrance into the great Sahara Desert. We none of us had a clear notion of an oasis, and therefore did not know what to expect.

A few minutes' walk brought us through the gorge, and there a scene presented itself for which we were totally unprepared. A blue stream, dancing in the sunlight, rippled gently over stones while a few half-naked figures were bathing in its waters. On either bank, rising some feet above the river's bed, myriads of palms, of all sizes and all shades, waved their fanlike branches to each other in the softly stirring breeze. Behind this unlooked-for mass of verdure was a range of arid mountains, shining orange in the brilliant light, with sharp shadows of strong clear blue. Enchanted with this sudden return from unending brown to quiet green, we made the best of our way to the water's edge, no easy matter where the luxurious vegetation is divided into square plots, or date-

gardens, by rough mud walls, well fringed with prickly bushes. Our doctor tried to jump into one of the enclosures, but failed signally in the attempt, scratching his legs severely with the thorns. A figure in white, of forbidding aspect, now appeared out of the grey-green gloom, and asked our business. The enclosure evidently belonged to him, and after making signs at him for some time he made out our drift, and conducted us through many little gardens, similar to his own, to the bed of the stream. Pleasant places these little gardens, the sun shut out by spreading palms, checkering with bright patterns the mossy earth, whilst the vine, the fig-tree, and the tamarind vie with each other in luxuriance of leafage. Round each low mud wall runs a dyke of water, which serves in some sort as protection, as well as for purposes of irrigation, to the enclosure within; which is further armed against the intruder by piled-up masses of prickly briar, forming a regular *chevaux-de-frize* of needle-pointed thorns against pilfering hands.

Arrived at the river's brink, we paused to look around. Never had anything so thoroughly novel

come under our observation. The peculiarity both of form and colour in the groves themselves, the cutting outlines of gigantic rock, with limpid deep-blue shadows, and, lastly, the strange figures grouped about us, all told that this indeed was Africa. We strolled along in the great heat, and at the bend of the stream came upon a noisy and a motley throng—the servants and wives of the Sheikh washing his best burnous! A man in a linen nightgown, or gondoura, draped close around his loins, jumping and kicking, and performing wondrous antics on a big flat stone, "treading out," so to speak, a mass of soapy draperies, attendant nymphs adding now more soap and now more water, each woman in the very scantiest of attire, generally bright in colour, up to the eyes in a lather of fuller's earth, with water up to her knees, and the most gorgeous jewelry on every spot about her person. Immense gold earrings, all incrusted with uncut stones, ponderous anklets and bracelets, and her hair plaited with thick cord and horsehair till it hangs in monstrous masses about her head; on the top of this edifice a coloured

handkerchief or two, wound in and out with strings of coral or silver chains. We sat for some time watching this curious picture, and were much amused in witnessing the general salutation, which took place on the addition of two more women to the party. They began by kissing each other's hands all round, then pressed them to their hearts and kissed their own, this performance being repeated again and again with little alteration and much monotony. Several men began to gather round us, feeling the sharpness of their knives, and frowning angrily at the too great interest we manifested in His Highness's ladies, so we thought it prudent to decamp.

Wandering over some stepping-stones, and up among the umbrageous plantations, we came suddenly upon a spring, where stood a perfect picture of a young savage girl filling a water-skin, her well-turned limbs exposed in all but a state of nature. At sight of us she turned and fled as fast as her heavy anklets would permit, she being an unmarried young lady, and consequently not yet to be looked upon by men. The Sheikh's son

now volunteered to show us over the village; and, penetrating through the oasis, we found ourselves in odd narrow little streets of houses built of mud, with no windows whatever, and a very rough adaptation, indeed, to serve in lieu of door. The whole *ensemble* partook of the dreary brown of the surrounding country, and the artists's eye longs for a touch of white, as one would long for water in the desert plains. From the tops of the houses, which are flat, and raftered with split-up palms, came howlings of dogs innumerable, while we had carefully to pick our steps among the prostrate Arabs, who were taking a mid-day siesta. The natives seemed much interested in us, asking perpetually about the prices of all that we had on, and seemed especially covetous of the bright-striped scarf that usually festooned about my neck instead of collar or other adjuncts of civilized life. We watched a man fixing on a pair of grass-woven sandals; ingenious contrivances enough, but painfully fraying to wear, one would imagine. It seems, however, that once fastened in their places, these shoon are never taken off until worn out,

and are then immediately replaced by others. The wearer of these foot-coverings accosted us, producing all sorts of francs and silver coins from unexpected places in his attire, and was very anxious to exchange them with us for gold, as space is of great consequence to them, hoarding as they do their little all in some corner of their burnous as long as it is possible for them to do so. In the course of our wanderings through the ins and outs of the queer and intricate village, we came upon many stones and pillars bearing Roman inscriptions—indeed, they say that such are always cropping up at the smallest overturning of the soil, and are eagerly sought after by the lazy Arabs, to be turned into door-posts and lintels in the modern habitations.

I spent nearly the whole of the next day sketching by the river side. The natives came in troops and sat round me, very civil and chatty, in spite of their reputation for lawlessness. We had been warned to keep our pistols near at hand in all our dealings with them, and "mine host" was much astonished that no evil had come of our staring at

the women the day before. In the evening we strolled into the darkness, and contemplated the rocks that frowned on us out of the dim starlight, while the howling of the distant dogs was repeated in dismal cadence by the never-ending echoes. We looked with curiosity at the bed of the river, rough and strewn with boulders, from the old Roman bridge that spans the chasm. It was from this bridge that the place derived its name, "El-Kantara," meaning "bridge" in Arabic. Up to a short time ago the diligence was forced to follow this stream-bed for lack of another road, and, in days of flood, the passengers bivouacked until such time as the waters should go down. But now, thanks to the French, a good carriage-way is in course of excavation on the cliff-side.

I was sorry when the moment came for leaving so pleasant a spot as El-Kantara, but our proximity to the desert weighed heavily in the scale against our remaining any longer where we were. The diligence rumbled up very soon (wondrous to relate) after the stated time, and we were shaken in somehow, turning out two luckless Arabs from the

interior, with an injunction to go "anywhere else." A most sorry vehicle it proved, bumping heavily on the springs at every obstacle along the road, and, in truth, they were not few! For three hours and a half we drove through hideous tracts encumbered with small round stones; arid sandy hills and plains, all pretty much the same in colour, and monotonous in ugliness. The road is simply dreadful, and made us ache most terribly as we tossed and tumbled up and down the steep inclines. Now and then we were forced literally to hold on by anything that was available, to avoid being thrown to the bottom of the carriage, or banged with our heads against the roof.

On approaching El-Outaia (the half-way caravansary), we came upon something that cured us of all our pains: a broad expanse of sand and stones, rising here and there into low hills; a long belt of pale blue mountains all round as far as the eye could reach. This was divided from the plain by a narrow line of verdure, most vivid in its greenness, and rendered all the more

so by the exceeding harmony of the remaining features of the landscape.

I looked at this for some time with feelings of great surprise—the mixture of the rich bright green with its barren surroundings seemed so unnaturally out of place. This line of verdure forms the oasis of El-Outaia, and consists of barley and a few palm-trees. In the midst of it stands a tower or minaret, conspicuous as the only white spot in the pervading burnt-up monotony. We were told by the dirty and garrulous old woman who kept the caravansary that there was a mountain of salt hard by very well worth seeing, should we find time to visit it; and she produced sundry specimens of it in proof of her assertion. Very good salt it seems, waiting only for some one to work it properly. The Arabs, in their own indolent and unsatisfactory way, detach loose pieces after the winter rains, and sell them about amongst the tribes even as far north as Batna and Constantine. Much saltpetre is also found in this locality.

The horses being sufficiently rested, we tum-

bled into our conveyance again, with ears and eyes all agape for the first real glimpse of the Great Desert. I caught "bits" now and again through the open window, which were eminently characteristic and picturesque. Stretches of long low land, quite orange in the sun—a line of camels, and the white figures of their gaunt drivers in high relief against the rosy hills, their lengthening shadows slanting blue and cool along the ground, a mass of colour rich and full, but blending and harmonious in its very brightness. As the sun lowered in the heavens, there was an incessant change in the effects, though the ever-varying blues and reds and violets scarce make up for the missing *green*. I never appreciated our own sweet meadow landscape so much as when gazing on these barren plains, gorgeous as they are, and dazzling in their vivid richness.

A few more jolts and bounds, and we were told to prepare for *the* sight *par excellence*. Thoroughly on the *qui vive* by this time, we leapt out of our seats, and started off on foot for the turn of the hill from whence the promised view was to

be obtained. Once there, we paused and gazed, and felt that it was indeed well worth the trouble of the journey. We stood on a high hill, from which could be traced the road winding down along the plain. On either side an amphitheatre of high and rocky mountains, their rugged tops cutting in sharp and jagged edge of intensely purple blue against a greenish yellow sky, lowering gradually, and blending by degrees into the far-off immensity of the Great Sahara, that stretched away in uncompromising line, and was lost, mingling with the horizon. The excessive peacefulness of the scene was most impressive—the sun setting gloriously in the west—a barren sea spread out before us, stern in its majesty, and calm in tranquil rest.

One's fancy will run riot on these occasions, and I could not but think, as I stood musing on the rock, of the numbers of nations and people that live on this great expanse, of the varieties of tongues and habits, of hopes and fears, of loves and animosities, congregated on this mighty plain, and wonder for what purpose they were created,

these hundreds of thousands of human atoms, living out their useless lives, and fretting out their petty passions—with what effect upon the outward world? Ignorant, savage, and brutal, of little use to mankind in general, and not much credit to their Maker. When will Christianity wake all these dormant souls to life? Will the day ever come, in the revolving cycle of nations' grandeur, on which the descendant of the despised African shall stand over the ruins of fallen Europe, and send forth edicts to the world?

We saw Biskra in the distance—a long belt of dark green foliage—its celebrated cypress towering like a giant sentinel above the lesser trees. As the brief twilight was rapidly turning into night, we got into our vehicle once more, and watched from its window the ever-changing colouring with interest and pleasure. There was a silvery shimmer on the foreground stones, as if reflected from some unseen light, which gave an uncertainty and atmosphere to the mass, in spite of the real distinctness of each bit of rock, that to my mind successfully disproved the theory of Pre-Raphaelitism.

A lovely sky behind the purpling hills gradated from a delicate green through red and yellow up to turquoise blue, flecked here and there with a light grey cloud just tipped with gold and crimson. As we drove into Biskra we passed through groves of feathery palms, tall and black against a blood-red sky, and were not sorry to find dinner awaiting us in the hospitable *salle-à-manger* of the Hôtel du Sahara.

CHAPTER XIV.

BISKRA.

THE Sahara is divided into three parts, or great divisions.

The *Central* part is occupied by the Touaregs, a race similar to the Kabyles.

The *Western* portion is an assembly of ancient tribes that migrated from the north in the eighth century.

The *Eastern* part is occupied by the remnants of the black races that once inhabited all North Africa.

The surface of the desert is far from being the sandy waste which in my ignorance I had expected to see. It undulates generally into waves covered with stones and little rocks, and well furnished with a scrubby grey-looking attempt at vegetation.

The mountains are not lost sight of on the northern side until close upon Tuggurt, many miles beyond Biskra, though one day we did get an idea of total solitude when the hills were masked by mist. It is rather refreshing to be able to look at them sometimes, arid and bare as they are, for they do not interfere on three sides of the landscape with the long bleak line, but form an amphitheatre from which the traveller may obtain a more perfect view. The face of the Sahara is wrinkled by wide river-beds, two or three hundred yards across, the stones and sands of which cover subterranean waters a short depth down. This theory accounts for the fact that the oases are all pretty much on a straight line, and that water is found at an average depth all along that line. The natives, struck with the phenomenon, seek of course to account for it by the supernatural. They say that the country was once inhabited by Christians, who, forced to leave their land, hid the water away, and are now beginning, by the same magic arts, to make it re-appear (referring to the Artesian wells in course of construction).

Biskra is the chief town of the Ziban, or group of thirty-eight Zab villages. The Zabs consist of eighteen tribes (100,000 souls). It has always held its own as capital of the Ziban, on account of its important position, standing as it does in the very mouth of the entrance into the Sahara, 295 feet above the level of the sea. It possesses 5,000 inhabitants, exclusive of the garrison of 500 men. This number of soldiers is considered sufficient, as their ranks could be augmented to any extent on very short notice from the *depôts* of Batna or of Constantine.

Our first day at Biskra was that of the fête of the Beyram; so we sallied forth, fully prepared for something extra wonderful, nor were we disappointed. Every one was out parading in holiday attire, whilst a salvo of guns from the Fort St. Germain announced that the month of fasting was at an end. It is a queer mixture, the modern town, consisting of wide streets and immense squares formed of tiny low-roofed houses and booth-like shops. Palm-trees grow everywhere. Go where you will, you are pretty certain to catch

a vista of the oasis and its palm-forest between two houses, or at the extreme end of some street; and besides this, there are straggling groups of these trees rising sometimes in the middle of the road, obstructing the thoroughfare, or leaning their top-heavy heads against a wall or window. There is a general absence of windows, by the way, in all Arab habitations; in this climate they are obliged to leave their doors wide open, and that serves every purpose of light and air. The few shops in existence are chiefly those of fruit-vendors, all other branches of trade being carried on in the great market hard by. This would make the streets look desolate, were it not the fashion to sit about in the road or on the footway, smoking cigarettes and sipping coffee. As it is, there is never a lack of excitement going on—always noise and always movement. The old town is situated about a mile and a half away in the palm-forest, and is extremely picturesque. It is almost exclusively inhabited by Jews.

It was a good opportunity for studying costume, this first day of the Beyram, for all were in their

best, and all were bent on a display. Men and children clustered round the Cafés Maurs, although it was but eleven o'clock, and the Oulad Nayls marched about, or squatted smoking on the ground, a perfect collection of queer silver ornaments.

The Oulad Nayls are *the* institution of the desert *par excellence*, and will hold a place in my memory long after the other details of this journey shall have passed away. They are the "dames légères" of the Sahara, and come generally from one special tribe in the vicinity of Laghouat. In this strange country, where the woman is not the equal of the man, we find a still stranger subject for marvel. The Oulad Nayls are far from being looked down upon for their little peccadilloes; on the contrary, they are a much-honoured race. No wedding is complete without their presence, and no women marry so well as these fair but frail daughters of the plains. Having made market of their beauty for a certain time, they return to their tribe, buy a few fields and some palm-trees, and set up as

respectable proprietors—a fit mark for heiress-hunting spendthrifts.

Their costume while pursuing their craft is very wonderful indeed. They are so wrapped up, and overloaded with clothes, that it is difficult to get any idea of their figures, as one sees nothing but a tangled mass of long draperies and handkerchiefs and chains, which don't seem to belong anywhere in particular. I will nevertheless endeavour to dissect one of these extraordinary anatomies, piece by piece, as far as I am capable of so difficult a task.

The body is draped, in the first place, in a long gown, that trails far behind, made usually of Manchester cotton print or some flimsy native stuff, which is joined at the shoulder by large silver pins, and doubled under the arms, so as to leave the sides bare to the waist. To one of the silver pins is attached a loose bandana handkerchief, used sometimes in the dance, and sometimes to mop the perspiring face of beauty. Round the waist is an immense length of silken belt, wound round and round the body, and hanging in tassels

to the feet. Their feet are encased in little embroidered slippers, or red morocco boots, over which fall the monstrous silver anklets, whose clanking gives notice of the approach of the fair one, and reminds the traveller of a prison yard. From the shoulders falls a cloak, dark and thick, and over that again is hung a white-striped cotton and silk sort of burnous, which sometimes trails in the mud, and is occasionally drawn over the head. The head is the most remarkable thing of all, and gives its *cachet* to the figure, more especially when seen from behind, as it is a great deal wider than the body (about three-quarters of a yard across altogether), and quite without form. The hair is plaited into four times its ordinary bulk by the addition of horse-hair and wool; and over this is built up an edifice of chains, sequins, and gold handkerchiefs, such as would supply half-a-dozen ordinary women. The fabric is only taken down once in three or four months, and forms, with its profusion of adornment and glittering scarfs, a comfortable nest for every description of unclean insect, such as must, I should imagine,

have been nursed in the heads of our great-grandmothers. Under the chin is often tied a gauze veil of red or green, which is knotted about the neck, and covers the whole construction. They steep their hair in henna as well as their hands, and this renders them even more filthy than they would otherwise be. Their silken burnouses and gowns are almost hidden under the weight of ornament with which they are encumbered—yards of silver chains about their necks and waists, on which are strung daggers and looking-glasses, and great boxes of talismans, all of solid silver; while the wealthier damsels have, in addition to all this, magnificent necklaces of coral and silver beads. Their arms are loaded with immense bracelets, and their fingers concealed by multitudes of rings. All these costly gewgaws flap and rattle as the ladies walk, and produce a singular effect where many are about. Their faces would not be ugly were they not plastered with rouge, and painted in patterns. The eyebrows glisten with oil, and the whole physiognomy is a mass of grease, otherwise it would crack with the thickness of the repulsive

unguents. From behind, as I have said, they present a very droll appearance—a mere bundle of clothes with a wide top, a tag, or a handkerchief, or a bit of gauze, sticking out generally of some inconceivable place, which gives a general impression of everything having been thrown at the figure, and stuck there by some magnetic power.

In one of the principal squares we found a large concourse assembled round a company of acrobats from Morocco. A characteristic assembly in the brilliant sun; the taller men ranged in groups behind, and the boys and little children squatting in an inner circle—a mass of white robes and swarthy faces, varied here and there by a stalwart negro with bare head, or a native soldier in his showy uniform. The performance was not too exciting, although it seemed highly to entertain the audience. One of the acrobats, clad in tunic and short linen breeches (evidently the funny man of the troupe), began a conflict with two small boys, whose business it was to attack him in front and rear, and pull his single lock of hair,

and slap his flabby face. The audience shouted and crowed, and quite shrieked with delight when the single combatant at length succeeded in getting his enemies in front of him, and hammering their heads well together. This interesting performance was repeated again and again, amid showers of coppers from the enthusiastic crowd. A little tumbling was gone through, but nothing was done that would at all bear comparison with European prowess. At this point a gaunt figure made his appearance in the ring, bursting through the circle in spite of all efforts to restrain him. A tall, wasted figure, of the Solomon Eagle stamp, weird of countenance and shorn of head, a miserable lunatic, moping and mowing, and swinging his lean arms maniacally in the air. His only garments were a pair of tattered trousers, and a red cloth knotted round his neck, which fluttered in the wind, and left him naked to the waist. It was a thorough madman's face, eager and bright of eye, with sunken cheeks wasted by imaginary woes. One could see his poor jaws working as he poured imprecations on the crowd, alternately

blessing and cursing them according as delirium impelled him. The throng stood silently respectful, for all lunatics are looked upon as sacred—touched by the hand of God—while a Turko soldier endeavoured to remove him, but the wretched creature only grovelled on the earth, and dug his nails into the sandy soil, moaning piteously the while.

There now arose a new hubbub in a distant corner of the square. A band of negroes was advancing to the sound of pipe and tabor, singing, and accompanying their voices with tomtoms and clanging cymbals. "God on high! God in heaven! There is but one God!" they cried, repeating it in every variety of cadence, and with every imaginable intonation. As fine a stalwart set of fellows, these negroes, as one would ever wish to see, broad in the shoulder and straight in the back, intensely dark in colour, and generally six feet in height. Before the occupation these men were enslaved and much illused by their Arab brethren, but now they have allotted to them a separate quarter of the town, and are said to be

good and willing workmen. They have brought many heathen rites with them from the Soudan. In localities where rivers render it practicable, they go forth once a year and sacrifice on the water's brink, while the negresses rush screaming into the water, and remain there half-drowned until pulled out by their husbands and male friends. They also hold periodical festivals of dancing and feasting. On these occasions the negresses are got up in flowers and rich gold stuffs; and very ugly they must look, I should think, as they are all frightful, offering a great contrast to the men, whom I ended by considering quite handsome sometimes.

Our attention was suddenly called away from the nigger procession by a sound of quarrel in one of the cafés, which of course gave rise to a general flocking of inquisitive individuals from all corners of the place. There was a general show of white-hooded figures, and a sprinkling of gorgeous women, glittering and clanking with a weight of jewelry; one of them, more magnificent than the rest, fair, fat, and forty, bedizened with immense gold ornaments, an unusual thing among

the Oulad Nayls, who seem to have a predilection for silver. The Jewesses, on the contrary, wear nothing but gold, and a handsome set they are. There is one now, passing down the street, fine-featured and delicate-complexioned, her long black oriental eyes shaded with soft dark lashes. She wears the black pointed cap of Constantine, festooned with thick gold chains, and about her neck is draped soft filmy folds of crimson gauze, all specked with shining dots. A pleasant and refreshing sight is her small head and natty attire, as seen by the side of the preposterously gaudy "ladies of the desert!" It is strange that even out here, in spite of their wealth in gold and jewels, the name of Jew is ever a term of hatred and reproach. In a tavern brawl you will hear the exasperated quarrellers call each other "Jews," when every other epithet is exhausted; while the unlucky camel that does not answer his master's expectations, is freely stigmatized with the same opprobrious title.

Quite bewildered with the noise and heat, we turned our steps towards the green oasis, in search

of the coolness and peace that were wanting in the busy town. There are calculated, by official report, to be more than 140,000 palms around this mass of buildings; and they look their full number, stretching away as they do in straggling file for an immense distance into the desert plains. We sat by one of the rare water-courses, on a fallen stump, and enjoyed the breeze that forced its way among the creaking stems and waving branches of the palm forest. Nature has made up for her parsimony in this quarter by the gift of the palm-tree, which seems capable of being used for almost every possible purpose.

The date-palm* (*phœnix dactylifera*) is the characteristic tree of the regions of Sahara. Its fruit is the basis of food used by all the nations that inhabit that immense district. Blossoms begin to make their appearance about March, and speedily give place to tiny dates, which increase in size until July, and then sweeten until the middle of

* For the following information I have to thank M. Hardy, the clever director of the Central Garden of Acclimatisation of Algiers.

autumn. This eccentric tree flourishes best in the land where no rain ever falls, and therefore Biskra is exactly suited to its requirements. It is in these rainless countries alone that the air is sufficiently dry for the perfect development of the fruit. At the same time it demands constant irrigation about its roots; whence the Arab proverb which says that "the date-tree holds its head in the fire, and its feet in the water."

The waters that furnish irrigation to the Biskran oasis come from the amphitheatre of hills called the Djebel-Aures, and flow into a great reservoir at some distance from the town. In ancient times of struggle this was always a point to be gained by the invader, as, once deprived of the water for their dates, the inhabitants of the green-belted city were soon brought to their knees. Each date-garden is watered every fifteen days in summer, and two or three times in the course of the winter, the surplus being used for barley crops.

Water is too valuable to admit of a general irrigation of the surface of the ground. Each tree is attended to separately by means of a trench round

its base. The quality of the water employed seems to be a matter of perfect indifference. The quality of the fruit depends more on the amount of heat received than anything else. The date-trees of the Sahara are multiplied by means of suckers springing from a parent stem. This plan is found to be more successful than the use of seed.

The average harvest of a good oasis is 8,000 lbs. per acre. Besides the dates which are consumed by the natives themselves, some are gathered and prepared with great care as "dattes de luxe." There are no less than seventy varieties of the fruit in the Ziban, or northern district of the Sahara. The tree and its produce are employed for a considerable number of different purposes. Thus, its boughs make capital ceilings and thatch, while its fibres are converted into matting and baskets; the trunks are used as beams for house-building, and when split up, form a tidy paling. Date wine, a very nasty decoction, is made out of the juice of the fruit, as well as a species of alcohol and first-rate vinegar. Date stones, when young, are boiled into a food for cattle; and the

young shoots of the boughs are eaten as vegetable.

Somewhat cooled by the refreshing shade of the oasis, we set off once more in search of the great cypress which forms so remarkable a feature in all distant views of Biskra. Our way led through the pleasant groves and date-gardens, and between over-arching palms, that swayed and creaked in the wind above our heads, breaking every now and then into an open space, where tender barley and the yellow-eyed daisy masked the barren earth. Traversing lanes enclosed by low, mud-built walls and ditches of questionable water, we at length found ourselves in "old Biskra," a very picturesque assemblage of queer old houses, half imbedded among the trees. At the open doors lounged men and women, sewing, or working at some trade; while dirty little Jewish children ran about among the gardens, their gay clothes glinting in the sunlight, their laughter echoing through the groves. There is an interesting mosque in this portion of the oasis; its quaint-shaped earth-built minaret stands out in full relief against the sky, while its entrance lies in a sort of subterra-

nean passage, rendered more gloomy by the luxuriant foliage.

Wandering about in an aimless manner, we were encountered by a French soldier, who turned out a very civil fellow, and offered to act as *cicerone* to the cypress. He had been stationed in this district for twelve years, and was anxiously looking forward to his discharge. He gave a dreadful account of the far-off oasis of Tuggurt, stating that it was utterly impossible just now for strangers to penetrate so far into the interior—a blow to us, who had been anxiously looking forward to the pilgrimage. It is the only spot in the Franco-Algerian dominions that is thoroughly deserted by Europeans, all military duties being carried on out there by the native regiments of Turkos and Spahis. They are a turbulent set, these Arabs of the Desert; a yearly inspection is considered necessary, to be certain that there is no brewing of insurrection going on.

In summer the French garrisons suffer severely from the climate and the saline waters. All their work is gone through in early morning, the *retraite*

being sounded at 11 A.M., after which the soldier sleeps or loiters about until 5 P.M. The want of good water is a great drawback to a residence at Biskra, as it retains a flavour of saltpetre, in spite of old-fashioned charcoal or any of the new-fangled filters. The natives do not seem to care, being accustomed to it, I suppose. You may see them any day sitting by the little watercourses, washing their feet and clothes and hands, and drinking deep draughts now and then, all this going on in the same pool, or rather puddle. There can be little difference in the external aspect of the country at any season of the year; the old palm branches wither and drop away, and are replaced by new ones. The ground maintains its usual arid look, and is as dry as ever, because no rain is ever known to fall here. When I say *no* rain, I am wrong, for it is reckoned that in very prosperous years there are generally two days of rain during the twelvemonth, one in spring and one in autumn.

We had by this time reached the cypress; and a grand tree it is, some 200 feet in height, well

grown, and well filled out in proportion. In summer-time it must be a thing to be avoided, for all the snakes and serpents and tarantulas congregate and abide amid its branches as a pleasant residence during the hot months! Now, though, we could rest under its shadow with impunity, and we accordingly did so, sitting on a mud wall, swinging our legs, whilst our guide related to us the particulars of an ostrich hunt down south beyond Tuggurt.

The hunting-grounds of Ouargla have a special charm for the sportsman. The horizon is only limited by the weakness of the human eye. In the undulations of the ground are numberless little woods, formed of pistachio-trees, as large as some of our forest oaks, with an underwood of oleander; and in the cover that is thus formed are quantities of gazelles and partridges and gangas. There are no springs or watercourses in this vast region. Reservoirs of water form themselves in holes and depressions of the earth, and are called by the Arabs "traitors," on account of the cruel deceptions which they practise on thirsty men.

In summer-time these reservoirs dry up, and by this provision of nature all fighting during the hot weather is avoided. It would be impossible for European soldiers to exert themselves out here in June and July; and the Arabs would naturally take advantage of this circumstance for revolt if they could do so, but the absence of water prevents their marching across the plains, and thus meeting in large bodies. They are compelled, much against the grain, to abandon their homes in the daias, or little woods, from May to October, and migrate with their herds to more hospitable lands further north; and it is then that the ostriches, driven from the equator by a burning sun, seek shade and pasturage in the deserted daias.

Ostrich-hunting then takes place in the hottest season of the year, lasting sometimes forty-five days, from the 25th of June to the 10th of August. "It is the heat even more than the pace which kills the ostrich," say the Arabs, and experience shows that they are right. It is only a select few out of the many nomad tribes who have the privilege of carrying on the noble sport. Previous

to the French occupation their only other business was the pillage of the caravans; but now they do it no more, at least in the territory under Gallic jurisdiction. Well made they are, and wonderfully organized for their life of movement and privation; dry and hard, with piercing eye and untiring ankle, possessed of a power of enduring hunger and thirst to their farthest limits. They make much parade of their new-born conversion and uprightness, on the principle, I suppose, of "assuming a virtue if you have it not."

"Our present goodness must redeem the errors of the past," they say; "we have a few lives upon our consciences, but God alone is perfect!"

A "few lives," forsooth!—they are modest, these good Arabs. Toumi, one of their chiefs, owned to nineteen murders.

"Yes, I killed nineteen individuals in attacking the caravans. Perhaps it is a greater number than is permitted to a good believer; but, after all, we only do as our fathers taught us; nevertheless, I admit that when I think of it I feel puzzled about the day of judgment!"

It may be well to say a few words of the necessaries which are indispensable for a month's sojourn in this "land of thirst." First, of course, stands the camel, whose faculty of remaining for four or five days without food renders him an absolute "necessity" in the desert. Four or five camels, therefore, are required for each hunter, who loads them with barrels of water, oats, and provisions, according to his intended length of stay beyond the line of civilization. Horse-shoes and nails must also form part of the store, as well as powder and shot for the killing of small game. There is no use in taking a tent, as the starry vault is the pleasanter covering in seasons such as this. Before the departure of a hunting party from Ouargla bands of men are sent out to discover the exact whereabouts of the ostrich-herds, a necessary precaution where water has to be so much considered.

The horses used for the chase undergo a system of training for fifteen or sixteen days before the start, being gradually deprived of oats, and made to take much exercise in the sun until

they bear the appearance of perfect skeletons.

Ostriches are hunted after one of two plans—the *bedou* or the *gaad*. By the former system the huntsman has but one horse, which necessitates, of course, the best animals and great science. If the party is a large one, the other plan is almost always resorted to. It consists of an ambuscade, towards which the birds are driven. When they pass the fatal spot the sportsmen rush out upon them, and pursue them hotly till they drop. The excitement of this system consists in driving the ostriches towards places where relays of horses are stationed. If this is not done, of course the quarry is lost, as it easily outstrips all but the very best beasts. Parties of natives on foot sometimes lie in wait for the birds in ambush, and shoot them for their feathers, but this is looked upon in pretty much the same light as the shooting of foxes in our own country. The gaad is rendered possible by the fact that the foolish birds almost always run in the direction in which they are started, unless terrified by a passing caravan, or some similar cause.

A troop of ostriches has such a fascination for the sportsman, that as long as they are in sight he can think of nothing but pursuit. All ideas of personal safety leave him. "El naam idjebed el kalb ou el aïn!" say the Arabs. "The ostrich tears our heart and sears our eye!" They keep in troops as much as possible, but when near their end are driven by instinct to scatter over the plain, and are then pursued by single horsemen until they fall down from exhaustion. The dear old story about their hiding their heads in the sand is an utter fabrication—like a good many other dear old stories, by the way. The flesh is very like beef in colour and taste, while the fat is considered a panacea for all kinds of maladies. There is not a portion of the ostrich but what is put to some purpose. The plumes are sold, the flesh is eaten, the skin of the neck and thighs is formed into bladders for the preservation of the fat, the skin of the feet is used for making coverings for the human foot, and the nerves are twisted into thread for the sewing of leather. There is an Arab proverb that says, "advantageous as an

ostrich!" Ostrich skins sell at Tripoli or Algiers for about six or seven pounds apiece. Much swindling is done by the easy-conscienced natives of the Mzab by the substitution of female for male skins when dealing with those who are not connoisseurs.

The ostrich has several accouchements per year, of from twelve to fifteen eggs apiece. She lays them on the open sand, sitting on them at night, and leaving them by day to the heat of the sun. If anyone attempts to rob her of her young she dares not defend them, although one blow from her foot would make sad havoc among a man's bones! The ostrich has an extraordinary stomach, devouring voraciously everything that comes in the way, even stones. This is not so very wonderful, after all, for animals without teeth are bound to supply their place by means of some rubbing power in their stomachs. The canary uses sand, the ostrich, from its greater size, requires stones, and is provided with powerful muscles to sustain their weight, some of them three inches thick.

When the unfortunate creatures are taken alive they are killed with sticks, in order that no blood may spoil the feathers. They are struck on the head and neck, which is fragile, and easily broken. Can we trace to this fact the fable of their hiding their heads under their wings? Their eggs are delicious. One of them will make an omelette for ten people.

The town of Biskra, after dark, is seen from its most characteristic side. Then it is that the streets are gayest and the Cafés Maurs most crowded. Most of the principal cafés are grouped together, standing in the street which is exclusively occupied by Oulad Nayls. Very pretty this street looks at night, a glimmering lantern hanging over every door, which when lit means that madame is "at home," and willing to receive a visit; when extinguished, that she is out, or occupied. If she is "at home," she is usually lying on the ground outside her habitation, the door of which is open, disclosing to view a snug little apartment, adorned with divans and mats, or else she is squabbling and fighting in the road, with discordant vociferat-

ing voice. We entered the first *café*, from the interior of which came sounds of dancing and the bagpipe. Pushing through the crowd, we were speedily supplied with seats, and, becoming accustomed to the smoke and heat, began to look about us. A high, long room, supported by two rude rafters, and lit by a few flickering oil-lamps. The ceiling was lost in gloom, whilst a yellowish light shone down upon a central mass of white-cowled figures sitting about in shadowy groups, with hazy contours, relieved with sharp touches of high light. A mysterious crowd they looked, with muffled heads and half-seen faces, reminding me of Dante's band of hypocrites so grandly described in the "Inferno" :—

"Laggiu trovammo una gente dipinta,
Che giva intorno assai con lenti passi,
Piangendo, e nel sembiante stanca e vinta.
Egli avean cappe con cappuci bassi
Dinanzi agli occhi fatte della taglia,
Che per li monaci in Cologna fassi.
Onde 'l Duca si volse, e disse, Aspetta,
E poi secondo il suo passo procedi.
Ristetti, e vidi due mostrar gran fretta
Dell' anino, col viso, d'esser meco;

Ma tar davagli 'l carco, e la via stretta.
Quando fur giunti, assai con l'occhio bieco
Mi rimiraron senza far parola;
Poi si volsero in sè, e dicean seco:
Costui par vivo all' atto della gola,
E s'ei son morti, per qual privilegio
Vanno scoverti della grave stola?
Poi disser me—O Tosco, ch'al collegio
Degl' ipocriti tristi se' venuto,
Dir chi tu sei non avere in dispregio."

The peculiar effect was principally due to the prevailing amount of white—white pillars, white figures, and white walls, all deprived of the whiteness, if I may make use of the apparent contradiction, by the smoke and obscurity. The entire arrangement of the *café* differed utterly from those of Tunis. Here the crowd are gathered in the centre, and all along the walls, leaving a vacant space or passage all round the room for the dancing Oulad Nayl, who floats about with flowing draperies to the music of the bagpipe and the tom-tom. The Oulad Nayl, or dancing girl of the desert, differs in every particular from her sister of Tunis. Whilst the latter is short of clothing, and abandoned in her gesture, the former moves slowly

and gracefully in a tripping walk, very long in the skirts, and smothered in many-coloured scarfs. She changes now and then to a sprightlier measure, giving one or two marvellous jumps and leaps, but soon relapses into a slow forward movement, accompanied by a slight swaying of the body and a waving of the hands and arms. Thus she goes slowly, slowly round and round the room, seldom changing her fantastic step, or varying the monotony of her motions, until she gives way from sheer exhaustion, when another immediately supplies her place.

The noise of the bagpipe—an instrument somewhat resembling the Neapolitan piferaro, blown by a Nigger with stentorian lungs—is excruciating in the extreme, the sound being terribly harsh and shrill. Driven out of this place of entertainment by the overpowering heat and want of air, we turned into the next, equally crowded with the last, and where much the same scene was exhibited, except that in this place the dancer was a Kabyle instead of an Oulad Nayl. This lady was assisted in her gyrations by two very small boys, who stopped

periodically to throw a handkerchief at you (equivalent to a demand for "coppers"). If you were liberal they kissed your hand with effusion, and twirled on again after the goddess with renewed energy and vigour. This *café* was wearing its festal robes in honour of the *fête* of the Beyram, the walls all draped with gaudy carpets and rugs, and the pillars masked with great palm-branches, that nodded to each other across the ceiling like monster hearse-plumes. In one corner, on a raised dais, sat a quiet circle of opium-smokers, inhaling the noxious fumes of hasheesh, and some of them already looking haggard and half-intoxicated. It is a horrid kind of drunkenness to witness. Instead of the stolid look of the wine-bibber, the opium-smoker is known by a staring and over-wrought appearance about the eyes, and a nervous working of the mouth and lips, that has a fearful resemblance to madness. Outside the *café*, rolled up in their burnouses, and laid out like corpses to await the morrow's wakening, were long rows of the wretched beings, who had already sunk helpless before their dreadful idol. When the

wakening does come, it brings its own punishment in aching limbs and intense mental depression—so great as sometimes to lead to suicide.

The "lovely Kabyle" was dancing round and round all this time, holding aloft in either hand the end of a scarf, with which she sometimes postured and sometimes mopped her perspiring brow. No wonder she perspired, poor thing, for the heat was intense, even to us who sat quite still; and what must it have been to her! A brawny black man, who struck the tambourine, got very excited, swaying himself into the strangest attitudes under the influence of the lovely creature's eyes. She was not particularly lovely, however, though she was graceful and fine in figure, and not raddled with paint, like the Oulad Nayls, and that is always something. She was nevertheless the worshipped of Biskra, and drew everybody to that especial café by the power of her charms. She and the tambourine-man went through a *pas de deux*, throwing themselves on one knee and bending backwards, much after the fashion of our own ballet performers, though with infinitely more untutored grace.

Once more in the open air, we wandered out to the borders of the town, to obtain an evening view of the long blue line of the horizon, that looks so like the ocean. In the chief market-place we came upon some picturesque groups keeping the Beyram feast in their own peculiar way. There were some musicians, with guitar and tom-tom, squatting in a circle in the open air, surrounded by other circles of white-clad figures; in the centre was a tiny light, which reflected ruddily in their faces, and threw great long shadows on the wall behind them. They kept up a monotonous kind of chant, one party answering the other, as is done by choristers in high-church services—a very tedious affair, suggesting a queer notion of amusement, accoording to our European standard. A little further on was another party, singing by the light of a fire, with the dim line of the desert as a background, whose dark faces and slight, fluttering garb looked quite elfish in the uncertain light.

The next morning I was awakened from pleasant slumbers by the guggling of camels; and on

looking out of my window, I saw three of these creatures lying peaceably in the road, waiting to bear us to Oumach, a village about fifteen miles south of Biskra. It is a delightful feeling, going to bed with the certainty of a bright sun on the morrow; no fear of clouds nor dread of rain! Oumach is the furthest point into the desert, in this direction, which is now attainable by travellers. Tuggurt used to be an orthodox expedition, but is now impossible through the unruly condition of the tribes in that quarter. We had ordered camels as an experiment in methods of locomotion, and I had sore misgivings as I seated myself on my animal's back, and felt him rise up under me. A most dreadfully earthquaky sensation it was, conveying an idea of going up for ever into the air. Saddle there was absolutely none, merely a species of pack, all tied with ropes, on the knot that bound which I was expected to sit. My camel guggled and gurgled in to me a very alarming manner, which alarm rose almost to terror when we came near trees and houses, as I felt myself utterly helpless on the great tall brute's back, and was

certain that he knew it, and would as likely as not scrape my leg against every obstacle, out of sheer malice. Malice, however, he had none, being as docile and amiable as his looks betokened; and a truly benevolent type of countenance he possessed, if Lavater's rules are to be trusted. It is just as well to try everything, if only for the new sensation, and an unpleasant one a camel's motion assuredly is—a long swinging walk of about four miles an hour, which jerks one's back unmercifully, together with a reckless waste of labour and fatigue consequent on a promiscuous going to and fro, beating, as it were, about the bush, instead of walking straight, like a Christian, in one direction.

To be carried whither he listed was to be my fate, for I felt that I might as well attempt to guide a locomotive engine as direct his erratic course. The walk was bad enough, but when it came to a trot, ye gods! all presence of mind vanished, and I was only too glad to cling to anything in order to keep my seat. One gets used to anything in time, however, and I accordingly settled down at last, and bore the pain pretty well,

until the moment arrived for dismounting, when the sense of going *down* was even more dreadful than the previous one of getting *up*. The camel bends his forelegs at a signal from the driver, which is given by tapping him on the knees, and gradually sinks by fits and starts, giving vent to a wailing kind of cry the while, eminently disconcerting to a nervous rider. Once on his knees one naturally endeavours to untangle oneself from among his legs; but not at all, there is another sinking to be effected, which ends in his lying on his stomach, when one rises easily to a standing position, with a pervading notion, however, of having been split up.

On starting we skirted the great palm forest, and advanced into the plain beyond, already becoming scorched by a fierce midday sun. In about three quarters of an hour we had got clear of the sandy earth of Biskra, on to undulating hillocks of fine white powder, which must indeed be annoying to eyes and lips when agitated by wind. The scene now bore the aspect of a gigantic moor, covered as far as the horizon by

bunches of a heathery underwood, stretching away in reds and browns, that effectually veiled the nakedness beneath. Here and there the eye caught long stretches of slaty blue, caused by the reflection of the blue sky overhead on the white incrustations of saltpetre that sprinkle the ground nearly everywhere; while the foreground consisted of camels' bones and broken sticks, shining and glittering in the sunlight. We now had the mountains of the Lesser Atlas behind us, and on every other side could trace nothing but the long line of monotonous horizon wherever we turned our eyes. Not a living creature visible on the whole expanse, except a solitary vulture, that was swaying and swinging slowly in the air, his wings just tipped with golden rays of heat. A lizard or two sped past,-from time to time disturbed by the unwonted noise, and was quickly out of sight. Here and there a deadly sandsnake, looking like an alligator in miniature, hideous and repulsive, whose bite is fatal within the hour; no insects, no other birds or beasts to break the dreary solitude.

The scene changed by degrees. The scanty bushes were left behind, and their place was taken by deep, dry, crumbling sand, hard walking for our guides. Nevertheless, they trudged cheerily on, a middle-aged Arab, in the conventional haik, and short cotton shirt, and a negro boy, a jolly little fellow, rich in colour and bright of eye, with such a pleasant, roguish smile as it did one good to look upon. The landscape is sad, but dreamy and impressive; the far-off pale blue line melting gently into circumambient atmosphere, before merging in umber and sienna with the incidental grass-tufts that surrounded us, rank patches of vegetation, with waving ends and sickly yellow tops. As Biskra and its oasis were lost in a filmy vapour, nothing met the view but a cutting rim of extreme distance, broken in one place by an indistinct mass of shadowy palms that concealed Oumach, our destination.

The further we advanced over the trackless plain, the more impalpable did the village seem to become, until we ceased watching it, and turned our attention to the long masses of coarse grass

which the camels were crushing beneath their feet. After a hot march of three hours and a half, we neared the oasis in good earnest, and were not sorry to distinguish clearly quaint mud walls and a crazy minaret. On a large space of undulating, open ground, stood the Sheikh and his attendant sons, who received us with ceremonious courtesy, and led us by the hand into what was evidently the sanctum, or presence-chamber, of the chief—a lofty room, with roof of plaited palm branches, supported by pillars cut from the same useful tree. A tiny window high up in the wall, by which only a little light was admitted, rendered it deliciously cool within, while without was dust, and sand, and scorching sun. The heat is pleasant, though, on the whole, dry and fresh, but powerful, unlike the heavy oppression of the London dog-days.

The room was perfectly bare, and devoid of furniture of any kind, as indeed are all Arab apartments. Mats were stretched on the ground, upon which we were motioned to be seated, and were immediately supplied with dates and camel's

milk, the latter a most horrible beverage, which, when allowed to stand, ferments, and possesses intoxicating qualities. We sat thus for some time, whilst the *élite* of the village passed before us, staring, as usual, with goggle-eyes and open mouth. The Sheikh nodded at us, thereby intimating that we were welcome; and we nodded blandly in return, in thankfulness for the same. At his left hand squatted the Figaro of the village, who had been busy shaving the heads of the Faithful when we arrived, but abandoned his trade and pocketed his razors to act as interpreter to the "illustrious strangers." He jabbered away accordingly an unintelligible jargon of Arabic and broken French, and we answered in a vague and uncertain manner, finding it very hard work to make out his meaning. The Sheikh informed us, through him, that he had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and seemed proud of it. He was astonished at our choosing camels in preference to horses or mules, and was very anxious to know whether they, the camels, were our ordinary means of conveyance in London. He regretted extremely that the chief por-

tion of his subjects were away in the Desert, feeding their cattle on the scanty herbage; but intimated that this was their usual avocation during the winter months, as they only return home in August for the date-harvest. He was great on the subject of the Duc d'Aumale, who, it seems, paid him a visit when travelling in Africa; and ended by assuring us that he, the chief of Oumach, was the *bon garçon* of the district, and the beloved of the French authorities. Seeing me staring at him, he apologised earnestly for looking "old" —a rather extraordinary proceeding on his part— stating that when properly shaved and got up, he looked quite twenty years younger.

At last the promised coffee made its appearance; and very glad we were, for the sun was beginning to sink ominously in the heavens, and threatened a lengthened march in the dark. Of course the whole congregation turned out to see us start, and we only succeeded in really getting off after many salaams and much shaking of the hand.

We took a different road on our way back to Biskra—a road which led across even masses of

fine sand-drift, rippled over like the sea-shore, and had the satisfaction of seeing the sun set on the open plain, disappearing like a ball of fire behind a deep violet horizon. Darkness came on suddenly, as is usual in these climates, and then the desert was much more striking than by daylight, spreading away in seas of inky blackness, with seemingly no limit or line of demarkation; conveying, on the contrary, an idea of infinite space—immensity interminable. The path led through the palm-avenues of Old Biskra, which looked soft and silvery in the chastening moonbeams, all the delicate tracery of leaf and stem coming well into relief against a starry sky. My camel led the way, and all but precipitated himself and me over a wall into an abyss below, in his nervous terror of the darkness. Difficult to guide before, he now became totally impracticable, and craned about among the trees to the risk of my neck. Our little Nigger exerted himself greatly, in spite of his fatigue, and belaboured the beast with a stick as high up as his short arms would reach, and at last steered him safely to the hotel-

door. We staggered into chairs and rested at last—swearing, not loud, but deep, that come what might, we had had our first and last ride on a camel's back!

Before leaving Biskra, we thought it incumbent on us to pay a visit to the garden of acclimatization—the Pépinière de Beni-Mora, as it is called—which is situated a little out of the town on the sandy plain. We wandered up and down its pleasant alleys without being able to gain any information, and ended by looking up the Director, who was taking his siesta hard by. He has been here ever since the establishment of the pépinière, now about ten years ago, and seems quite reconciled to his banishment. Arab boys are the only workmen of whom he can avail himself, and they (like Arabs in general) are wedded to indolence —"impossible," as he himself termed it. We saw some of them at work—if work it can be called—digging for a few minutes, and then lying down for a little repose. He did not seem to mind, however, being pretty much used to the annoyance, more especially as they are only paid

by the amount of work that they get through. This gentleman was exceedingly severe in his denunciations of the Arab race. He doubts the sincerity of their religious fanaticism, because (which is certainly true) they will eat pork and get drunk as much, if not more than the Christian dogs, *if only there is no one to peach upon them.* He considers them utterly untrustworthy, from a warped ignorance or carelessness of right and wrong, and sets them down as liars and thieves, even up to the chiefs, who march about so proudly with their crosses and decorations.

In this garden are gathered together specimens of all sorts of tropical trees, with a view, of course, to their future introduction to Saharian soil. Thus we find the soap-tree from Guadaloupe, and the gourd-palm from China, everything, in fact, that will bear the heat, both useful and ornamental. Drawbacks, of course, have to be contended with. The saltness of the water is very injurious to the more delicate plants, which are only watered once in two or three weeks in summer, and never in winter, for fear of overchilling the atmosphere.

There are still traces on many of the shrubs of the great grasshopper plague of last year, and a fearful scourge it must have been. They came in flights, which appeared as a cloud on the horizon no bigger than a man's hand, and advanced like the wind, in such terrible force that the very birds fled dismayed, and the whole heavens were obscured. They remained in the neighbourhood over three months, devouring everything around them, beginning with the delicate shoots that they liked, and ending with the tough palm-branches which they did not like. They disregarded all the noise and tom-tom music that was got up to frighten them, and were killed in millions by the natives who came out to fight them. My friend the Director took to laying down heaps of dry grass at intervals, into which the beasts crept in swarms, and when safely in, were burnt on a series of funeral piles.

Ravenous and ruinously destructive as they are, they are never known to bite a man, being purely graminivorous in their nature. The ingenious natives managed to derive some benefit even from

this plague. They salted the grasshoppers, and used them as articles of food. Though full of little bones, they are not so very bad, I am told, tasting something like attenuated sardines. Great quantities of them were stored up as articles of subsistence; and, together with dates, and a little bread, will form the dinners of the natives for many a day to come.

In the Director's room I saw a wonderful specimen of a shield, made of hide stretched tightly over bamboo framework; and thinking that it was a relic of some savage tribe, I inquired into its history. It turned out, however, to be one of the articles of warfare still used by the warlike Touaregs, far away in the south. Their fastnesses are in the unknown wilds of the desert, and perhaps some day they will be the means of opening a direct communication with the Soudan. Meanwhile they rob the caravans, and amuse themselves by suddenly pouncing on unwary travellers. When on a pillaging expedition the Touaregs live upon the pods of one of the desert shrubs, and are trained to go without food for an enormous space

of time. They must have fertile oases in their territory, for the few of their number who have ever penetrated northwards were not astonished at the pasturage of the Tell, only at the height of the mountains.

The name Touareg signifies veiled, and they are so called from the fact that they wear their haiks much like a woman's yashmak, up to the eyes. They go without shoes, for they say proudly that they never go on foot. They are tall and well-made, with white skins and remarkably small hands. Their arms are never laid aside, being fastened to the person by means of leather thongs. They consist generally of the above-mentioned shield, a sword, and a long lance, with poisoned tip. The women wear black pantaloons, and dark-blue stuffs draped about their forms, and are very pretty and white-skinned. They have one remarkable peculiarity—when girls they go quite naked, and when married they are clothed. The reason they assign is not a bad one: "A woman must be seen before she is married; once married, she must be seen by none but her husband. The men go veiled because

they should be hidden from their enemy!"

Although the Touaregs are of the same religion as the Arabs, they differ from them in many things. In the first place, they hate and detest them; and in the second place, they only intermarry amongst themselves, have but one wife, and follow none of the outward forms of the Koran. They resemble the Kabyles, to a certain extent, in language, type, and energy of character. In fact, the Touaregs, Kabyles, and Chaouia (a tribe in the mountains of Batna) speak a tongue which is a relic of the original inhabitants of Barbary, who were of Vandal origin.

On our way back to the town we passed through the quarter of the Oulad Nayls, and came upon a wonderful specimen of them, sitting in the sun, enjoying her coffee and a cigarette, an old and majestic lady, who returned my nod with a distantly disdainful inclination of the head. She was so magnificent that I thought it a good opportunity of finding out the average value of the ornaments worn by these women on their persons. We therefore stopped, and she very civilly told

us the original cost of many of the gewgaws with which she was bedizened. She wore no less than three large necklaces, one of gold, and two of massive silver, a profusion of gold ornaments on her head, and magnificently worked earrings of the same costly metal. A large poniard and a silver looking-glass dangled from her waist, whilst her arms and legs were weighed down with enormous manacle-like bracelets. All this we estimated, on calculation, as worth upwards of £260; no slight amount in solid metal, independent of stones, or other fictitious source of wealth. It strikes one as funny to see this sort of display laid out on a Manchester cotton gown, such as would be worn by our housemaids, though to the Oulad Nayls it is the same kind of luxury as satin and velvet are to our own ladies.

CHAPTER XV.

COTTON IN THE SAHARA.

WE had now been a week at Biskra, and feeling that it was thoroughly "done," were anxious to take up our carpet-bags and walk. I therefore called on the Commandant-Superieur of the Bureau Arabe, to obtain from him information as to our proposed route, and letters of recommendation to the Kaids on the way. I told him that we wished to penetrate through the Hodna plains, and return to Algiers by the Portes de Fer. He was excessively civil, and offered every assistance to facilitate our progress, dissuading us at the same time from the undertaking, as the road goes through the heart of a disaffected district, amongst rebellious Arabs, who have no sense of honour, and traverses plains and passes haunted by wild beasts and

wilder men. Perceiving that he was wasting breath, he gave in, contenting himself with a few words of warning and advice. As a precaution against our own followers, we sent our three muleteers (who were strangers to us) to have their names inscribed on the Government books, so that, in the event of our disappearance, they would be unable to return to Biskra; thus securing ourselves against treason in the camp. We were all armed, and being seven in number, considered ourselves quite safe against attack.

On my way back to the hotel, I met the funeral of a Zouave who had been killed in a Café Maur the night before. His death originated in a riot about an Oulad Nayl, between a party of Zouaves and another of Turkos. These two regiments hate each other, as the latter, which is recruited entirely from among the natives, considers the former a set of interlopers, because its ranks are filled with men of every nation under heaven. On this infinitesimal cause of quarrel, therefore, the two regiments came to blows; the result of which was that several men were killed, and many wounded.

We started off on the 12th of February, with good mules, for a wonder, and accompanied by natives of a higher class than that to which we had been accustomed: fine stalwart fellows, free of action, and clean of limb, with a long swinging stride, like the Highlanders of Scotland. We took a farewell of the misty horizon of the Desert from the heights of the Lower Atlas, and descended into the plain on their northern side, where we visited a M. Dufourg, the cotton-planter of the neighbourhood, according to appointment.

In the course of a rustic *déjeûner*, I opened fire on him (having been previously primed by my Glasgow friend), and succeeded in taking him in as to my cotton knowledge and general commercial standing. He told me that cotton had never been tried in this portion of North Africa until four years ago, when the immense capabilities of the country for the growth of this plant became apparent. The soil of the higher grounds of the Sahara is all that can be desired for the purpose, being sandy and porous by nature, and strongly impregnated with salt. So richly endowed is it,

that on the slightest scraping and application of a little water, it starts as it were into life, being expressly created seemingly to suit the requirements of the indolent inhabitants. The great drawback, up to the present time, to the successful production of cotton in this quarter, arises from the almost total absence of water; the little there is belonging in the first place to the natives, who sell it in their turn to Europeans at fabulous prices, measuring it in some inexplicable manner of their own by the width of any of their hands, regardless of the difference in size of these members. They use it themselves for irrigating the palms of the oases; and sometimes delay surrendering it into the possession of its after-proprietors until it is almost too late to put it to its intended purpose. In this case the unfortunate colonist has but little chance of redress, it being the policy of the Imperial Government to favour the Arabs, and gently to check the too rapid progress of colonization. The reason of this, according to M. Dufourg's suggestion, is that the large standing army of France is in constant need of a safety-valve for its super-abundant mili-

tary ardour, as well as of a school for the training of young soldiers, both which purposes are served by the petty warfare of the Christian against the Mussulman. The blindness of a policy which keeps veiled the capabilities of so great a theatre of industry is apparent at a glance, though at the same time it is to be presumed that the certainty of the existence of this mine of wealth is sufficient for the present to its fortunate possessors, who are well aware that when the time arrives they have but to open the gates and let in a band of thirsty capitalists.

We have seen elsewhere that colonization to a certain extent was necessary to the existence of the army of occupation. Is not the seemingly incomprehensible policy of the Government to be explained by the supposition that they desired to serve two masters—to eat their cake and keep it—in other words, at once to colonize the country, and to keep it bare for a military parade-ground? In pursuance of this line of action, it was to be naturally expected that all obstacles would be thrown in the way of any English-

man or other foreigner who should come to fight for a share in the spoil, and endeavour, with the peaceful weapons of industry, to win his way to fortune. To so great an extent is this repression carried on, that quite lately, when a merchant of Mulhouse offered to sink an Artesian well at his own expense, he was peremptorily refused permission to do so, on the plea that they had not yet been sufficiently tried by Government. It is true that things are beginning to look up in this quarter. If the Fremy-Talabot contract is signed, which is now under discussion in the French Chambers, a new era will begin to open for Algerian colonists. By this contract a certain amount of land is to be placed in the hands of Messrs. Fremy and Talabot, who undertake to do all necessary draining, and sublet it to enterprising men. The plan looks pretty on paper, but it remains to be seen how much of the agreement will be fulfilled on either side.

M. Dufourg is a sanguine man as to his future prospects, and is only waiting to be joined by some one with capital to invest, in order to launch

out in a larger undertaking than he has at present under his hand. It appears that the land he holds was given to him by Government *on loan*, with the option of adding any number of acres to it, by reclaiming it from the sandy wastes around. This loan had no specified time to run, being, in fact, a gift, liable to be withdrawn in case of failure, which might cast a shadow on the country in the eyes of the outer world. Of course Government would not *give* any more land to anyone else, but declares itself prepared to sell a certain amount of it to any purchaser. Little could be made out of it without the introduction of Artesian wells; and it would not be worth while to make these wells unless the proprietor had a large extent of land in his possession. Government is "not prepared to part with large tracts of territory" at present—consequently this seemingly paternal offer means nothing at all!

M. Dufourg, having been originally a common stone-mason, and being devoid of education, cannot be taken as a fair sample of a flourishing cotton-grower on the soil of the Sahara. He is ignorant

of his business, and unable to imagine what might be made out of so fair a possession in the hands of one of our own long-sighted fellow-countrymen. This is amply shown by the fact that he knew nothing of Egyptian* seed or its results, though he instantly proposed inquiring about it on being informed of its superior qualities. He could not even tell me whence he drew his original crop, as it was supplied him by a Mulhouse merchant, whom I take to be his real backer. Ignorance is bliss perhaps in some cases, but surely not in business transactions like the one at present under notice. The results of his own experience are of course intrinsically valuable in the way of statistics and working details, though the opinions which he draws from them must be taken at their proper value.

* A letter published in the *Moniteur de l'Algerie*, dated March 20th, 1867, states that the total of exports from Egypt, in 1861, amounted only to 200 million francs; that, in 1865, it amounted to 445 million francs, of which 431 million francs were for cotton alone! If this result is attained in these few years in Egypt, why should not a similar one be arrived at in Algeria, whose soil is allowed to be fully as suitable as that of Egypt?

The new railway which will shortly be opened between Philipville and Constantine, as well as the new roads in course of construction between Batna and the Desert, will facilitate the proceedings of the cotton-grower to a great extent.

The cotton that is grown on M. Dufourg's plantation is of very superior quality, and unusually long in the staple; it is so fine that few of the French manufacturers possess machinery sufficiently fine to spin it. It was classed, indeed, in one of the late exhibitions, as equal to the very best Charleston article.

M. Dufourg started in this business four years ago, with fifty acres under cultivation, out of which he made 24,000 francs the first twelvemonth; but this was a remarkable year, and above the average. He planted his trees at the rate of one per square yard; they grew to the height of six feet, each tree bearing about 500 capsules. An acre of land may be looked upon as requiring ten pounds of seed, which sells for about £1 the 200 pounds. The land is allowed to rest for a year every two or three years, and is then put

through rotation crops of barley, oats, &c. M. Dufourg has latterly used his own seed, taken from his own plants, worked alternately with American grain. He considers that a cotton plant is of little use after the second year.

As the cotton season only lasts from May to September, he is enabled to grow a barley crop during the remaining months, which should defray the current expenses of the entire business. Another, gentleman, on the other hand, told me that it would be perfectly feasible to grow a double crop of cotton, supposing always that a sufficient quantity of water were attainable; but M. Dufourg says that for long-staple cotton it would be impossible. Whether his opinion is of sufficient weight to decide this matter I should be inclined to doubt. We visited his buildings and outhouses, which are of a very primitive description, and an inconsiderable item in his expenditure. The cleaning machines are only five in number, worked by water, and revolve at the rate of fifty turns a minute. The land is good, but requires a considerable quantity of manure before it can become

what it should be. This it is difficult to obtain, as that which comes from the barracks (the principal supply) is used up for the fertilization of the palm-gardens immediately around Biskra. On the Hodna plains, where cotton has also been tried with success, the use of such extraneous aid is considered unnecessary; but then it must be borne in mind that land in that quarter costs five times as much as in the country of the Sahara. Human labour is cheap, being estimated at one franc per day. One native and one bullock would work an acre in six days. M. Dufourg reckons that his total annual expenses per acre amount to 125 francs, which equals £5. For the last two years he calculates that he has made nothing by his business, on account of the grasshopper plague, which ravaged his land for two seasons consecutively, remaining three months at a time. During that period 300 natives were perpetually at work defending the plants, at a salary of one franc per diem, notwithstanding which nearly all the trees perished.

The following is an extract, translated literally,

from a letter received from my friend, M. Dufourg, since my return to England. I leave the reader to judge of it for himself.

"I hasten to reply to the questions which you put to me in your last letter.

"For the cultivation of cotton water is all that is necessary; as for ground, there is no lack of it. Water has to be bought from the Arabs. It would be quite feasible so to regulate matters with them as to realize that which they fail in achieving. I know of several districts which have been abandoned from time to time because of the rapid growth of dwarf-palms, &c., which choke up their ill-constructed 'barrages,' and thus deprive them frequently of water during the most important seasons. We, the settlers, might, with capital, erect works and dig reservoirs on these spots, resigning the water to the natives for their crops during the winter, using it ourselves in summer for our own especial cultivation.

"If sufficient capital were attainable, we might make at El Outaia, from whence I write, a reser-

voir forming a basin capable of holding enough for the irrigation of 60,000 acres in cereals during the winter months, and 30,000 acres of cotton in summer. Thus we should obtain a double harvest, selling our cereals to the Arabs, who are forced to buy it in this neighbourhood at a high figure.

"I will write to you in September, in order that you may come again and judge for yourself of our cotton at the time of ripening.

"After three years of reverses, I am not discouraged, being satisfied that my cotton is superior to any other which has yet been sent to France. I gained two first-class medals at Mulhouse, in the Exhibition of the Industrial Society.

"Arab labourers cost me one franc a day. The working of a hectare (two acres and a half) costs 200 francs. One hectare is capable of producing 150 kilogrammes of cleaned cotton. The cost of picking I calculate at twenty-five centimes (twopence halfpenny) per kilogramme uncleaned. Come, then, sir, and pay me another visit in the autumn. You will then convince yourself of the

truth of what I have stated, and we will go together and see the places most suitable for cultivation."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PLAINS OF THE HODNA.

ON leaving M. Dufourg, who wished us a pleasant journey, we went on to El Outaia, where there is a horrid caravansary, under the charge of very rude people. Dogs abound there, as they do indeed in all Arab villages, of a kind of fox-like half-breed, whose special mission it is to bark, and bark they do most lustily through the whole night. We did our best to sleep amid the hurly-burly of the canine race, but soon gave up the attempt, and began preparations for an early start. Our mules were in good order, which was lucky, considering that there is no road, or even footpath, in these untraversed wilds; and the traveller is forced to trust to the vague indications of passing Arabs, who have no notion of time, and

little of distance, for his information. As we started, the sun rose behind us in mitigated brilliancy, reminding us that we were leaving the cloudless heavens of the desert, where there is a certainty of fine weather, for the hill-country of rains and storms.

Our way led through sandy plains, which changed gradually to rocky hills, varied with rocky valleys; no vegetation visible, except perhaps a scrubby bush of cold grey-green, catching the eye by contrast with the pervading heat. At length we lost the flatness to which we had become accustomed, and wandered on through such a scene of desolation as it is difficult to convey to one who has not seen it—undulating hillocks of coarse, loose sand, broken now and then by a hoary boulder, or a loose mass of shingly stones, that rattled down and fell with an echo under our cautious tread; bald cliffs, which closed us in on all sides, only opening out to display a repetition of what we had already passed through—more bare, more bald, more melancholy than before; no sun to brighten this dismal pros-

pect; a dull grey sky overhead, that darkened into blackness towards the horizon, throwing everything into gloom; no living thing to break the solitude, unless it were a lizard darting from our path, or a herd of gazelles galloping quickly out of sight.

About midday we reached a miniature oasis, which could boast of a dropping stream of trickling water (a rare thing out here), and a clump of oleanders waving on its edge. As this was the only water we were to see in the course of the day, we dismounted from our beasts, and unpacking the provision-box, prepared to make ourselves comfortable for half an hour. Suddenly there was a rustle in the brushwood, and one of our men, cocking his pistol, and shouting, "Ah! un Arabe!" immediately turned to me for powder—a very opportune moment for the request! It turned out, however, to be nothing but a wild boar, which scuttled away, only too glad to be quit of us. Before remounting, it was thought advisable to fire off our pistols, in case they should miss at a critical moment after long disuse. One

of the guides carried a most murderous weapon slung round his neck—a sort of overgrown horse-pistol, which gave a report like a cannon, swallowed up a vast quantity of powder, and only propelled a very tiny ball.

En route again, amid scenery of the same melancholy character. The difference of the various strata became very strongly marked, lying in streaks of blue, yellow, and red, sometimes horizontal, and sometimes upturned in an almost vertical direction by some convulsion of the earth long ago. More bleak hills and tumbling shingle, more sand-plains and stony undulations, but no sign of living being or human habitation. Though man was wanting, there was no lack of his handiwork. Heaps of stones on all sides of us testified to the burying-places of men murdered by the lawless natives, many of them evidently of quite recent erection, causing most unpleasant thoughts to arise in our breasts as we passed by them! As the sun lowered, so did the clouds, which soon covered the hills with mist, melting into drizzle, and ending in heavy rain. Still we

toiled on through the sand and stones, and at the turn of a barren hillock, came in sight of Mdoucal, our place of rest. It is the same kind of oasis as all the rest—when you see one you see all. There was the same long line of shadowy palms, thick towards the centre of the group, the number dwindling gradually into one or two ghostly trees, that wagged their ponderous heads, and swayed their attenuated trunks clear-cut against a darkling distance. A long avenue of mud-built walls led towards the dwelling of the Sheikh—a winding and narrow road, with palm-gardens on either side, and great almond trees overshadowing the way. These trees, though devoid of leaves, were laden with thick clusters of a lovely blossom, somewhat resembling that of our apple, which hid the branches from view, and presented the appearance of a delicate pinky-white tracery, like hoar-frost in the last blush of sunset.

The Sheikh received us civilly on reading our letter from the Bureau Arabe, and allotted us a sort of house, cold, dark, and damp, which looked unpromising enough. We sat down, how-

ever, on the carpets prepared for us, and proceeded, with what patience we might, to undergo the tedious ordeal of "visits from the natives," a fatiguing process after a long day's march. They flock in by troops on the first intimation of an arrival, and after sitting and staring their fill, then give place to others. There is not the slightest use in making any objections, as it is the orthodox thing, and there is no chance of obtaining any food until the levée is at an end. We got a fire of dry palm-branches on the earth in front of our carpet, and I set myself to prepare some Liebig soup, with more energy than prudence, as a proceeding so novel only lengthened the period of our discomfort. We sat, therefore, the observed of all observers, and drank our soup while "the big round tears coursed one another down our innocent noses in piteous chase," produced by the stifling smoke, that found no outlet into the outer air. Though the two doors of our habitation stood wide open, all draught was stopped by the crowds of Arabs who came to gape at us and enjoy the fire.

On showing symptoms of our desire to go to rest, the place was cleared by our guards, a party of men told off by the Sheikh to watch over our safety. We made shift as best we could under the circumstances, though the wind, accompanied with increasing rain, blew in through the unglazed windows most distressingly, and fairly fought with the smoke for mastery. The musical noses of our men precluded sleep, for they snored in varying cadence; whilst the howling of the wind and the beating of the rain, which now fell as only African rain can fall, together with the incessant barking of the dogs, produced a concert the hubbub of which acted seriously on the nerves. I was not sorry, therefore, to get up and prepare for the road. The "preparation" consisted of a cup of tea made in an Etna, and a hasty ablution in the street, one of our men holding a tiny can of water while another looked after the soap. Anything in the way of hair-brushing was quite impossible. So we got into the saddle for another day's journey, only too thankful that the rain was keeping off. It had poured in such torrents during the night, that our

proposed route was voted to be impossible, on account of mud and moving sands. Dreadful stories being told us of mules disappearing altogether in the quicksand during the rainy season, it was resolved to make a *détour* through the more sandy country of the Batna division of the Hodna plains, which would probably land us at Msila in three or four days; though on this point we were delightfully vague, no one knowing the way or the distance, or the difficulties we should have to encounter.

We started off, however, in high spirits, and turning our backs on Mdoucal, began to skirt the base of the rocky mountains we had passed the day before, wandering on in great uncertainty until we came upon a nomad chief and his array of tents pitched on the open plain. At about a hundred yards from the encampment we came to a standstill, and waited, according to etiquette, the approach of a deputy sent by the chief to inquire what we wanted. This is done partly on account of the women, who of course must never be seen by foreign eye, and partly as a precaution

against the dogs, that rush out on a nearer approach, and bark, howl, and bite at the legs of incautious wayfarers. I suppose these dogs are kept as guards against intrusion, though in my experience of their tent life I never saw an Arab move or make a sign for such a warning. The chief in question gave us a guide to conduct us to the borders of the next tribe. This worthy strode on ahead of us, looking sourly the while from below his tattered hood, as though he hated the very sight of Christian dirt!

We had now the satisfaction of knowing that we were passing through the territory of the very wickedest tribes in all Algeria—quite the Fenians of North Africa—who are perpetually in a ferment, and ever ready to rise at the first prospect of revolt. Few Europeans have ever passed this way. The officers of the Bureaux Arabes traversed it on the first distribution of land after the occupation; and two years ago, when the volcano of rebellion burst into flame, the sedition was crushed with an iron hand. Further than this, these tribes have no knowledge of Europeans, nor, for that

matter, do they seem to desire it. They speak confidently of the day, not far distant, when the African shall plant his foot on Europe's neck, with other balderdash of the like description, but for the present submission seems to be their policy.

We passed through great plains of sand, that ended in the horizon, hidden from us by the gathering mists which obscured the sun, and concealed from view the range of mountains on our right. There were little lakes along our route, well stocked with game, flocks of geese, and wild-duck, that flew off affrighted at our approach. We travelled on in perfect ignorance of our whereabouts; each Sheikh or Chief, as we passed on from tribe to tribe, sending a man to lead the way, and conduct us to the borders of his territory. The sandy plains gave way to heavy bog—the great sticking capacities of which painfully impeded our movements. We were well aware that time was gold, and that to be benighted in these ill-omened tracts was to insure attack, and possible destruction.

Arrived at the encampment of Sheikh Baleuti,

of the tribe of Oulad er Mezek, we halted, as usual, and the Sheikh himself rose from one of the low, dark tents, that look like sandhills, scattered over the plains, and advanced to meet and welcome us. He was a fine tall man, in a clean burnous (for a wonder), with a silken haik, and soft patrician draperies; a dark oval face, and the regular features of the Moorish nations, fine black moustache, and short square beard. He motioned us to dismount, and ordered carpets and cushions to be spread for us. On these we lay, and nodded at him, our only sign to intimate friendship and gratitude. We ate our own provisions, and drank the muddy water given to us with disgust. Drink is always a great difficulty in these regions, the water being thick and muddy if fresh, and loathsomely bitter and disagreeable if drawn from the goat-skins. Sometimes milk is offered, but it is generally sour, and full of floating hairs, and goat or sheep's milk is at the best no very pleasing beverage. Our Sheikh eyed us with great interest, as we were the first Englishmen who had ever passed that way. His questions, put through

an interpreter, argued innocence indeed as regarded the doings of the outer world beyond the blue mountains of his native land. He assured us, among other information, that the English were a great nation, who lived exclusively on the sea. Can this idea have arisen from some vague notion of the ancient sea-kings from whom we are descended? He was a grave man, our Sheikh, grave almost to melancholy; but no Arab ever really laughs, a gentle smile is his only indication of merriment. If any one laughs loudly in his presence, he looks about, imagining that some one is making fun of him. A fear of ridicule is one of his tenderest points, which may perhaps account for the wandering and unsteady look of half-wonder that sits deep in every true Arab's eyes, as though he were always on the defensive, with "ears back ready for a kick," if I may be allowed so rude a simile.

We left the friendly chief with salutes and shakings of the hand, and following the horseman whom he sent with us, soon came in sight of the great salt lake—the Chott of Saida—a fine piece

of water, seen as we first saw it, peaceful and still, glistening like a silver shield in the one ray of sunlight which seemed sent through the heavy clouds to give this bit of brightness to the dreary landscape. Hills high and finely-cut along its western bank; while in some places it is so broad that one cannot see across it.

All the country around this lake forms the great plain of the Hodna, which is, or ought to be, the garden of Algeria. This plain, or series of plains, is enclosed between two mountain chains—that of the Sahara, and that of the Tell-maritime. These act as filters, and produce a regularity of climate which accounts for their having been the granaries of ancient Rome and Carthage. The land is rich, varying between sand and marly clay; it is clean, moreover, and unencumbered with stones, besides being freed from the dwarf-palm, the curse of the colonist—a most tenacious plant, the rooting out of which is one of the chief items of expense on first settling in Algeria. This fertile territory belongs entirely to the Arabs, and is unattainable to the European, being now in course

of allotment among the tribes. It is scratched up and cultivated, according to the Arab notion of cultivation, which is so imperfect as to pass almost unnoticed by the traveller, unless he were informed of the fact. The whole plain is at its worst for want of drainage. This would cost a large sum, which neither the Arabs nor the Government seem inclined to pay. The Bureaux Arabes give out that their policy is to leave the native in possession, leading him on by little and little to improve his land, and become by degrees as finished a farmer as his French master. A chimera—a dream, impossible of fulfilment. The Arab has not it in him to work out anything requiring energy or purpose, and will always go on in the same groove, trusting in Allah, and burying his money in a napkin, so long as he shall retain his *fainéant* nature and his Mussulman religion. Meanwhile this grand country is permitted to remain unworked, in spite of the fact that it might be made to pour oil and corn into the foreign markets, and supply with cotton the British looms. Two years ago barley was found in this district to

reach the enormous height of two metres; while specimens prepared for the Paris Exhibition of this year bear as many as 450 pickles on one stem —a land of Goshen indeed! In pursuance of the same system of repression, difficulties are thrown in the way of travelling into regions such as these, in case books should be written which might bring this state of things too much into the light of day.

The following fragment is from a Government report hitherto unpublished, which is interesting, as showing that the Romans did not allow their colonies to lie fallow, as do the French:—

"Ptolémée mentionne Tobna come une cité puissante. Ibn-Haucar, qui a visité ce lieu, nous dit que cette ancienne ville est bien arrosée et possède de nombreux jardins et des champs de coton, de froment, et d'orge. On y trouve aussi de nombreux troupeaux de bœufs, de moutons, de chameaux, et d'autres bêtes de somme . . . . Plusieurs fois déja, en citant les auteurs anciens, nous avons dit d'après eux, que le coton était cultivé en differents endroits. La culture de cette

malvacée, dit M. Dareau de la Malle, semble avoir eu de grands développements en Afrique, surtout dans les parties du Hodna dont nous nous occupons. Les anciens connaissaient parfaitement le coton. Théophraste, dans son histoire des plantes, décrit l'arbre qui le produit avec une exactitude qui ne laisse aucun doute à cet égard. M. Dureau de la Malle cite un passage de Pline qui prouve qu'il existait quand cet historien a été en Afrique ou le cotonnier arbrisseau (gossypium frutesceus) ou un arbre du genre des bombax qui donnait des productions analogues. 'Quelques auteurs,' dit Pline, 'rapportent qu'en Arabie les maures s'élèvent en sept mois à la hauteur et à la dimension d'un arbre, et peuvent dès lors servir de baton.' Mais on trouve aussi une maure arborescente dans la Mauritanie, près du Golfe de Lexos, à 200 pas de l'océan ; ells atteint à une hauteur de vingt pieds, et sa circomférence est telle qu'un homme ne peut l'embrasser. La culture était aussi florissante dans les plaines de la Hodna au dixième siècle."

In the course of the afternoon, we came upon the river Barika, which flows into the Salt Lake,

and which it was our business to cross in spite of its swollen condition. Very unpleasant it looked, tumbling and rushing along, all thick and yellow with accumulated clay, like the "flavæ capillæ" of old Father Tiber. On its banks were sitting a party of five ill-looking men enough, who turned out to be robbers, waiting by the river-side for any stray horseman who should chance to come that way, in order that he might be attacked and "finished" while battling with the waters, and unable to escape. The "gentlemen of the road" took no great heed of us, beyond looking longingly after the baggage, for we were too well armed, and in too great numbers (mustering seven), to warrant an attack from such cowardly hounds as these. We now turned our attention to the great question of the stream, and sent two of our men into it to sound its depth. They stripped themselves of their scanty clothing up to the breast, and, steadied with thick sticks, began the crossing, we following in single file, nearly carried off our beasts by the surging tide. The width of the river at this point is about half a mile. Having

satisfactorily gone through our bath, we put spurs to our jaded mules, and forced them on as best we might, being anxious to reach some kind of quarters before nightfall, considering the critical proximity in which we found ourselves. Accordingly, about sunset, we came upon a fine plateau, rich pasture land, all dotted with sheep and cattle, a curious oasis to us after the barrenness we had gone through. The whole scene seemed so pastoral and peaceful, that I could hardly fancy myself in a lawless and cut-throat country, but rather transported by a magic carpet to "la belle Normandie," or the green meadows of our own native England. This idea, however, was speedily dispelled by the appearance of the mole-hill tents of a wandering tribe, and the apparition of some native women with hardly any clothes, and monstrous ear-rings, bearing water on their much-enduring backs.

This was the encampment of Sheikh Saad-Ben-Saada, who presently came out to meet us on becoming aware of our approach. He demurred somewhat at our claims on his hospitality, on the

plea that he had no tents to spare, evidently wishing us at Jericho for disturbing his household arrangements in this manner. At length he retired and consulted with some one inside the enclosure, and eventually turned out the women from their abode—the unfortunate women always suffer on these occasions—and prepared their tent for our reception. It looked small and uninviting, but being all that we could get, we were fain to be thankful, and accept the accommodation with gratitude. It was a close low tent, of some dark coarse woollen fabric, full of holes that seemed ready to let in everything in the way of rain and wind, supported in the middle by a rickety pole about five feet ten, from which centre-point the tent fell in folds to the ground, not allowing its occupants to stand upright. The front was raised with sticks, so that three sides only were covered in —these three, by the way, being all loose along the bottom. The gap, though covered with brushwood, let in the draughts in a manner far from pleasant, considering that there was snow upon the hills.

We crawled into this our abode, right glad of

its friendly shelter, and straightway set to work to divide it into two parts by means of bags and saddles, one place for our men, and the other for ourselves. Unseen female hands had meanwhile been busy with the exterior, and by their care the draughts were partly diminished, leaving us cozy enough, though rather short of space. The Sheikh, who came and sat with us, according to Arab etiquette, stared with solemn eyes at our arrangements, diminishing our room, and thus increasing our discomfort; whilst Hamoud, the "thorn," bestirred himself for once in his life, and having procured fowls, cut off their heads in a trice, and broiled them in an earthenware pipkin over the fire at the entrance to our tent. It was a picturesque sight at this moment. The swarthy faces of our men and the heavy folds of our tent, lit up with a ruddy glow, and a broken foreground of bags and sticks shining red in the firelight, contrasted vividly with the dim blue landscape without, the moonlit shadowy tents, and the snow-capped mountains. After we had partaken of some muddy water and execrable milk, the Sheikh, upon an

intimation that we wished to sleep, retired, leaving a guard to watch over our slumbers, and betook himself to his own, as we were assured by the hideous snoring that was soon heard from his tent.

We discussed the propriety of watching by turns during the night, in case of attack in so unprotected a position, but resolved rather to trust to the much-vaunted Arab hospitality. Hospitality is one of the first laws inculcated in the Koran, and has taken fast hold (except under circumstances of extra-temptation) of the warped intellects of the wild tribes. They will strain every nerve to procure anything that you may desire as long as you are their guest, but once off in the morning, will waylay and shoot you quite coolly if the idea enters their darkened brains. We slept, therefore, without the slightest fear, though the dogs howled incessantly, the goats made inroads upon us at intervals, and the mules kicked and neighed close to our ears. In the morning we awoke with broken backs, aching all over by contact with the damp hard ground. We determined unanimously,

nevertheless, that camping out is very pleasant, although the scene in the morning, when one emerges from the mass of poles and sticks upon the bleak plain, amongst cocks and hens, and lowing herds, is most peculiar. I should have liked to have wandered through the encampment, but was followed so jealously by my guard wherever I went, that it was impossible. I could not leave the tent for a single instant without having him after me, nominally as a protection against the dogs, in reality to see that I caught no glimpse of the women. What a strange contradiction it is, keeping them thus so sacredly out of sight, and at the same time treating them as no galley-slave would be treated in a Christian country!

As soon as our small arrangements were accomplished, off we went again across the weary tableland, led this time by the Sheikh in person, on a fine Arab steed, with magnificently-embroidered high-peaked saddle. He had really been most kind to us, taking great trouble to supply our wants, and giving us butter for the cooking of our fowls; butter which is so scarce out here, that it is

treasured like the apple of one's eye. We loaded him with presents as a reward for his liberality, tobacco and gunpowder, the latter a really valuable gift, as the laws forbid its sale to the turbulent Arabs of the tents. He seemed a shrewd man enough, asking the motive of our journey, and inquiring particulars about our country. He marvelled much on being told we were ruled by a woman, and from that moment we sank in his estimation. When we told him that the English loved the Arabs, he bowed majestically, and offered to sell us horses like his own, a very pretty little animal of Arabian breed, for about £25 apiece. From this infliction we excused ourselves as best we might, and took leave of him with many promises of a speedy return. He bent over his saddlebow with much quiet dignity, and remained motionless until we were out of sight, led on by a gaunt creature in white rags, who strode rapidly and silently ahead. We came upon great herds of camels, of two or three hundred at a time, belonging to the tribes through whose land we passed. They are estimated altogether at about

200,000; and except for the migration of the *douars* are almost unused. The wealth of these people is always estimated by the number of head of camels they possess. All this district abounds in wild game of every description; gazelles, plovers, partridges, and ortolans. Storks are considered sacred all over North Africa, as in Germany, and are tame accordingly. Troops of flamingoes may be seen in summer time upon the waters, glistening with brilliant plumage. Among the hills there still exist relics of a species of wild bull, although the race has nearly altogether died out.

We splashed through the mud, stuck in bogs, and then, after slipping into a ditch, scrambled anyhow up the opposite bank, straining every nerve to keep the long guide in sight, who marched inexorably on, knowing that if we lost him we were lost ourselves, in a district of quags and holes, without road or path, or even track. The soil is fine and rich, though sadly in want of drainage. On our left throughout the day lay the great salt Chott, or lake, spreading away in a long low line, with a scarcely perceptible indication of

shadowy hills beyond. We met two horsemen (closely veiled, as is the fashion when on a marauding excursion), who passed by, rendered prudent by our numbers. It certainly is a new sensation, although one gets used to everything in time, to look with suspicion on every man that crosses your path, to treat him as your natural enemy, and to lay your hand on your pistol at his approach. It is having "your hand against every man, and every man's hand against you," in the true Cain-like acceptation of the saying.

By this time we had lost our way completely, having been abandoned by our ragged guide, who seemed to have dropped through the earth somewhere. We therefore stopped on a piece of rising ground to hold a consultation. To travel onward after dark was impossible; and nowhere on the great plain before us could we perceive a tent or human dwelling. The horizon was anxiously scanned with glasses, and in the extreme distance we thought we could detect something that rose out of the earth like a great tree, and which we conjectured to be a portion of the town of Msila. As in these

immense expanses of level ground, it is impossible to judge of *mileage*, we calculated the hours of daylight that still remained, in order to make a rough guess at our chance of reaching it. For the time being nothing could be done but push on; we certainly could not stay where we were in the vast solitude; and, whatever our fate was to be, it was as well to get forward on our way. On we went, therefore, through clay and water, stones and sand, until at last a few mud-huts appeared in sight. One of our men then started with all speed to make inquiries as to our farther progress. On coming up with him again, we found him in altercation with a savage, half-starved wretch, who shouted in guttural accents, and gesticulated with sharply-pointed finger. On demanding the cause, we discovered that we were at a hopeless distance from Msila, and that the tents of the Kaid Si-Sachrid must be our shelter for the night.

These tents were pitched on a species of fastness in the midst of surrounding moors, protected from attack by the friendly proximity of bog and

morass. To attempt to reach them in the failing light was simply impracticable; and this man refused most stubbornly to lead the way. Here was a new obstacle, and one not easy to overcome; but by dint of threats and promises he was at length induced to yield, and we followed him through mud that clung like glue about our feet, and over bogs and ditches, only rendered passable by branches strewn over them. The man was sulky, and went so fast that we could hardly keep him in sight, as his dingy clothing could scarcely be distinguished from the earth in the rapidly increasing darkness. Our men were therefore forced to cry out every now and then, to discover his exact whereabouts. On the half-seen figure sped, until the encampment came in sight —dark black cones in a spreading ring, lit up with many a gipsy-like fire. Shelter at last, though the overwhelming crowd of barking dogs augured but a doubtful welcome. These, beaten off with sticks, ran howling back into the night, and as if aroused by their tumult, a mass of ghostly forms, appar-

ently emerging from the ground, assembled on the open space in speechless wonder. Suddenly the moon shone out from behind a cloud, and the scene was weird and fantastic to the last degree. The gathering concourse, as if from the cities of the dead, cowled and shrouded in frosty grave-clothes, increased momentarily. I was strongly reminded of the great scene in "Robert le Diable;" only this Desert scene was more still and ghastly than the got-up counterfeits behind the foot-lights. Presently a tall black figure joined the throng, shadowy, like Hecate, come to rule the conference; and then another, in a peaked and broad-brimmed hat—a witch, a Mother Shipton, or other goblin of the pantomime, animating the shades to some elfish incantation. Streams of light from above shone green upon the earth, casting long shadows over its face; behind, a glimpse of looming fires, and great wild clouds scudding madly across the moon. Hecate spoke. The spell was broken—the illusion at an end. The black ghost turned out to be the Kaid's son, who ordered a tent to be pitched for our ac-

commodation—a nice comfortable soldier's tent, white and clean. Mother Shipton, who was in reality some subordinate of the Kaid's household, decorated with one of the immense palm-hats from Tuggart, was soon busy in preparing carpets and cushions—magnificent embroidered cushions of gold and brocade, which had evidently been borrowed for us from the much-enduring women. Our tent, though pretty to look at, was far from air-tight, allowing a perfect whirlwind of breezes to blow about our heads. Our welcome was a cold one, as the Kaid was away; and nothing that we asked for was forthcoming. His son admitted in the course of conversation that he believed the English to be a very wicked race, saying that he dared not go to London on account of the danger of the expedition! An idea industriously circulated among the tribes by their French conquerors, for reasons of their own.

We rolled ourselves in our burnouses, and composed ourselves to sleep—a sleep disturbed, as far as I was concerned, by a dreadful nightmare in the

form of a creeping man with hands upon my breast. Nearer he came and closer, till his weight was more than I could bear; and I woke from feverish slumbers to find a great cat sitting on my chest in stern reality, with fiery eyes staring into mine. I sat up, startled by this unlooked-for apparition, just in time to see the creature beating a hasty retreat through a hole in the canvas; and, looking round at our sleeping men, all huddled among the saddles, I lay down once more to woo the god of the poppy and the lotus-crown. The guard that had been posted, as usual, for our protection was stretched across the tent entrance in so profound a state of unconsciousness, that I fancy a gun fired in his ear would scarcely have awakened him. There were sniffing muzzles of many dogs working busily for bones around the canvas edge. It was certainly unwise of us to have left such tempting bait just within their reach, for as they burrowed for bones they disturbed our walls, and let in sudden and unexpected gusts of wind that nearly blew us away.

When day dawned, we rose unrefreshed, and

solaced ourselves with a cup of our own tea, which might have been some mediæval herb for any taste it had of anything save goat-skins, and prepared wearily to mount once more.

Discovering that we were really not so very far from Msila after all, we resolved to make a *détour* for the purpose of visiting M. Jus, a French engineer engaged in boring Artesian wells. This gentleman was commissioned by Government for the purpose, and is supplied with Zouaves in lieu of other workmen. Up to 1864 twenty-two of these wells had been successfully completed, some of them in the Hodna, and some of them in the Desert itself. The great object of the borings was, in the first place, to revive the oases of the Oued Rir, fast falling to decay; and secondly, to establish upon the direct line of caravans and troops a series of fountains such as should facilitate commercial relations, and render permanent the conquest of the country. M. Jus received us most cordially, showed us over his encampment, and explained his admirable arrangements. His camp consists of soldiers' tents grouped round a lofty scaffolding

containing the boring machinery, the same which we had taken in the distance, the day previous, for some giant tree. There were heaps of iron piping and other heavy goods lying about, which must have cost something before arriving in this out-of-the-way spot. Whenever the encampment is moved to commence operations in a fresh direction, three hundred camels are required for the purpose, provided by forced loans from the neighbouring tribes.

This is quite a model of an encampment. There is a bakehouse, where we saw some excellent white bread in course of manufacture; a butchery, a workshop, and a most ingenious oven, that is taken to pieces at half-an-hour's notice, and is packed away on three camels' backs. M. Jus invited us into his own tent, where were tables and bookcases nattily fitted up, books and papers from France, periodicals, and other luxuries of the like description. He gave a flourishing account of the prospects of the country, should Government see fit to change their tactics with regard to colonization. A great deal of barley is sown by the Arabs, and

grows magnificently, in spite of their ignorant method of working, fetching in the Sétif markets the enormous sum of eight francs the twenty litres (about a five gallon measure), in consequence of the havoc produced by the war here two years ago. Land it is impossible to obtain at any price in the Hodna, as it is divided into disjointed parcels, which dovetail hopelessly together; besides which, the Arabs of this district cling jealously to their rights of proprietorship. The few colonists that are settled here are free from taxes; why, I failed in making out. The Hodna tribes are hard hit by the *Zekkat* tax, as nearly all their wealth consists of camels and cattle. Cotton has been tried with signal success, as is amply shown in the accompanying Government report,* which, by the way, was private, and not intended for my sacrilegious hands.

M. Jus had himself made the experiment on several isolated patches of ground; and on applica-

* *Cotton picked at Guillaluja.*—Georgian, long staple, very white, very fine, very long, very silky and strong. Well cleaned on the whole. It is advised to pay more attention to cleanliness in the picking. Finally, it is cotton of

tion to Government for permission to proceed was met with a peremptory refusal.

M. Jus, most hospitable of men, prepared a gorgeous breakfast for us, consisting of course of "all the delicacies of the season," and sent us off, after we had eaten, not only with many good wishes, but a

very superior quality, averaging in value from ten to eleven francs the kilog. (2 lbs. 3 ozs.).

Cotton picked at Melkasnak.—Georgian, long staple, white, with the much-esteemed yellow tint in it, long and silky, probably cleaned by hand. Excellent cotton, averaging from nine to ten francs the kilog.

Cotton picked at Am-Nakrar.—Georgian, long staple, yellowish white, rather long, strong and nervous. Tolerably well cleaned. Average price, eight to nine francs the kilog.

Cotton picked at Barika.—Georgian, long staple, fine colour, very dirty, and badly cleaned. This does not detract from the intrinsic value of the cotton, although it lowers it in price about two francs the kilog.

These specimens leave nothing to be desired except a little more attention in cleaning and in picking Were this properly attended to, the cotton grown at the above-named places would stand deservedly high in our markets. May our ships be soon loaded with such produce.

(Signed) HARDY,
Director of Acclimatization Gardens at Algiers.

(Counter-signed) F. AUBLY,
Commandant-Superieur Bou-Saada.

January 11, 1865.

liberal supply of cigars, which, by the way, are worth their weight in gold out here. A couple of hours' ride brought us to Msila, so longed-for the previous day—an Arab town, or rather village, lying on both sides of a rapid river. There were a few palms scattered here and there, gaunt and grim, to remind us of the past. The principal foliage, however, consists of almonds, oranges, and cactus—fitting introduction to the mountainous country of the Atlas, into which we were soon to penetrate. Msila is a good specimen of an Arab town untouched by European hands; it contains a population of 7,000 inhabitants, of whom only twelve are French.

We rode into the court-yard of the French caravansary, most delighted at the prospect of taking off our clothes and brushing our hair, after six days of hardship, and no water to speak of.

The Kaid dined with us, as also did the lieutenant of the Bureau Arabe, who was full of grievances, and gave us some idea of the hard work these officers are expected to go through, with little remission, the leave they are allowed to obtain

being but scanty. One month's leave in the space of three years is all these hapless exiles have to look forward to. They camp out for a month or two at a time, in their business of limiting the tribes, a task which entails endless quarrels and heart-burnings with the natives, and must be an unenviable one indeed. Two or three only of these officers are placed in the distant stations, and they live so isolated from French communion, that they end by becoming more Arab than the Arabs themselves, delighting in kooskoos, and worshipping at the shrine of the Oulad Nayls.

CHAPTER XVII.

MSILA TO ALGIERS.

THE Kaid was sitting outside his house as we passed, on our morning walk, and invited us to join him in a social thimbleful of coffee. We squatted down accordingly on the straw mat by his side, and smoked the calumet of peace, basking in the sun the while—rather a public performance, though, in the middle of the street! The coffee these people drink is excellent, strong, perhaps a little too thick for European taste, and generally over-sweet, according to Eastern fashion. Their tea, on the other hand, is execrable, strongly spiced with caraway, and altogether a most sickening beverage. Having gone through the necessary performances of hospitality with the Kaid, we succeeded in escaping, preceded by his own henchman

as guide to the lions of the place. This worthy began by carrying us across the river on his back, an undignified proceeding, but the only means of reaching the best portion of the town. It is a queer, rambling place, perched on the summit of a hill, all the houses low and mud-built, the first floors projecting on rude rafters over the road. The tumble-down court-yards are full of quaint nooks and corners, and crazy galleries, in which the inmates sit and work all day, embroidering for the great Friday markets. Each house has its wide low doorway, coigned with ancient Roman stones, closed with a ponderous conglomeration of wood and nails, and finished usually with a massive iron ring.

The Arab portion of the population gain their livelihood by means of gold and silver embroidery on red morocco leather, a coarser species of the same description of work as that of Constantinople. The Jews restrict themselves to metal, and turn out all kinds of jewelry in bad gold and worse silver. We went about from house to house examining the wares, the only way of find-

ing out anything about them, as there are no shops, and no great quantity of articles kept in stock. All that is made during the week is sold at the great market held every Friday, and taken thence into the interior. The chief feature of the place, in my estimation, is its closeness and exceeding filth. No air seems ever to penetrate its fetid passages, while every species of horror is allowed to decay and putrefy unnoticed in the sun. Why Cholera does not reign here always, I know not; a more fitting throne for such a deity it would be difficult to find.

At dinner we met the Kaid once more, and an officer of the Bureau Arabe, who related an anecdote illustrative of the manners and customs of this charming people. The hero of the story is a rich and highly-educated chief who now resides at Batna, smothered in dignities and honours. About the time of which I speak, this man's brother was shot in a manner that bore strong indications of foul play. The perpetrator of the act was nowhere to be found, nor had they any clue to the establishment of his identity, as the brother himself was too much

injured to be of any use in the matter. At a certain ball which took place shortly after, a woman, driven by jealousy, accused her lover (a total stranger to the chief) of having done the fatal deed; upon which the chief seized him, and confined him in a cellar until such time as Providence should decide whether his brother was to die or to survive. He died, and the accused was instantly put to death with horrid tortures, without trial or tribunal. Upon this the French authorities interfered, remonstrating with the chief for so summary a proceeding. He defended himself by declaring that his brother's blood cried for vengeance, and would not wait for the lengthy forms of French justice. He was tried and imprisoned in due course, considering himself, notwithstanding, an injured individual and a martyr. This occurred only a few years back. What is to be done with a people whose educated men act like this? Rude in their ideas of what constitutes murder, they are still more so with regard to marriage. A formal repudiation, three times pronounced before witnesses, is considered

equivalent to a divorce. The multiplicity of wives results in there being no old maids, for everyone, however ugly, can easily procure a husband. A rich man possesses not only wives to be the mothers of his children, but also wives to make his dinner, and wives to work as field-labourers.

The natives of this neighbourhood are tolerably clean and *soigné* in their attire, which, by the way, only consists of a gondoura, or linen shirt, and a couple of burnouses. Those of the south, who live nearer the equator, have no knowledge of water as a cleansing medium, on account of its excessive scarcity. They perform the necessary ablutions ordained by the laws of Mahomet with sand or gravel, so that their state of filth is inconceivably dreadful.

The town of Msila would form a capital centre of operations for the sportsman, as every sort of game abounds, and no license is necessary. There are wild duck and geese, snipe and woodcock, partridge and plover, hares and gazelles; everything that the heart can desire, even up to panthers and lions. An Arab was killed by a panther

just outside the town a few days before our arrival.

The "limitation of the tribes" is going on in the neighbourhood of Msila slowly but surely. As soon as it has had time to work, there will be a great change in the political aspect of this district. Up to the present day the uncertain lines of demarcation between rival properties have been a fruitful source of broil and trouble. The shepherds who guard the flocks of camels commence a dispute upon the rights of pasture; the women take part, words lead to stones, and stones to sticks and guns, and then the whole tribe takes up the matter, and a general scrimmage is the result. The new settling of the boundaries will not affect the half-yearly migrations of the Saharians during the summer months into the Tell or northern district; but the very fact of their possessions being accurately chalked out, will prevent the repetition of the usual squabbles on their winter's return to claim their own again. Experienced men are of opinion that years will pass over before the work is accomplished. Arabs are tenacious of their

rights, and being dull of brain, are not easily brought to new convictions; therefore there will be endless objections and reclamations before all is allowed to settle down into peace and working order.

There is a prophecy, preserved or invented by the Marabouts, which says that "when the Arabs shall have been ruled for a certain time by the French, a Schériff will rise up, having a light beard and black eyes, and will chase away the invader." In 1860 a descendant of Mahomet, who happened to have the requisite characteristics, announced himself as the chosen instrument of vengeance, and raised the whole of the Hodna in revolt. The country of the Steppes had up to this time been particularly quiet, and the rebellion was treated with contempt. Gradually, however, it assumed serious proportions, and Colonel Pein was sent with a strong body of cavalry against the insurgents. The Schériff was taken, and the movement smothered, but several friendly Sheikhs and *soi-disant* allies of the new régime were found to be among the prisoners. They did not attempt

to excuse themselves, remarking simply that, "though they liked the French, and were grateful for the benefits conferred by them, they were called by the Schériff, and were obliged to fight under his standard. The arrival of the French was decreed by destiny; they were sent to do us good, to construct towns and roads for us, but the day will come when we shall hunt them out, for Allah has said it!" These worthies argue thus, and it will therefore be long before the African colony can work without the help of a standing army, in spite of the firebrand declamations of M. de Girardin, and his assertions to the contrary.

I questioned my friend of the Bureau Arabe, who seemed thoroughly well up in Algerian matters, as to the discoveries with regard to the mineral kingdom that have been made up to the present time. A great quantity of iron is found in the neighbourhood of Bona and Bougie, more especially at Alélik, where it is estimated that the mines produce 2,000 tons per annum. There is a great factory at this place, the only one in

Algeria, for the manufacture of projectiles, as well as for the production of steel; it is being carried on with great success. There are rich lead mines in the vicinity of Tenes and Sétif, besides a considerable amount of copper. Oran is rich in antimony, whilst gold is found in insignificant quantities in the basin of Oued-el-Dzehel, or the golden river, in the province of Constantine.

Porphyry, onyx, and fine blocks of alabaster are brought from Sétif, as well as a marble which is supposed to be the same as the celebrated Numidian stone. Near the Cap de Garde of Bougie exists a veritable mountain of white marble, much resembling that of Carrara, in which may still be seen two Roman quarries. It was much employed for the ornaments of the Carthaginian palaces, although its looseness of grain is against its use for open-air decoration. Chalcedony is found in its neighourhood, while the valleys of Ben Misra (near Blida) are rich in emeralds. There are vast depots of porcelain-earth and valuable deposits of lime near Bona; salt is to be met with near

El-Outaia, and in immense rocks near the oasis of Laghouat.

We took leave of our friendly Kaid on the morning of the 18th, and started off once more on our homeward journey, expecting to sleep that night at Bordj-bou-Aréredj, and to reach Algiers a very few days later. The road was said to be practicable for a carriage, but some very wonderful vehicle must have been in the eye of our informant, for anything more quaggy and sloppy than this road it would be difficult to imagine. Holes and ruts, indeed, told of past traffic, though after the heavy rains wheels must have sunk to the axle-tree at every five or six yards. It is an ugly country, well cultivated on the whole. Low hill rises behind low hill in wearisome monotony. A watercourse, with its waving woods of oleander, brings relief to the tired sight every now and then, and forms fitting shelter for the game that everywhere abounds. By the side of one of these watercourses we paused and breakfasted, remarking with interest the odd appearance presented by a Marabout's tomb and its surroundings. The

Faithful, as they pass, tear off a rag from their garment, and hang it on a neighbouring twig in memory of the departed saint. Thus all the trees that grow within a few yards of the holy spot become loaded with these peculiar relics, and at a distance appear to be covered with snow, or enveloped in white bandages.

In the afternoon a violent storm of rain and hail came on, descending with African vehemence, and drenching us in a few seconds. Under these circumstances we spurred on our sorry beasts, and with much difficulty got them into a canter. Splashing along through mud and mire, we at length came in sight of Bordj-bou-Aréridj, a colony of Frenchmen some two hundred strong, buried, as it were, in the midst of a wild Arab population. Bordj-bou-Aréridj commands the whole plain of the Medjana, is situated in the centre of the Atlas range, and communicates with the plains of Sétif. In 1841 the name of Abd-el-Kader became a terror to the industrious people of these proverbially fertile plains, who accordingly retired to the hills, and, under the auspices of Government, built

themselves this little town. It is entirely modern, not possessing a single native-built habitation. A Bureau Arabe is established here, and the town boasts of a barrack capable of accommodating two thousand men.

Having mentioned his name, I cannot resist saying a few words on the subject of Abd-el-Kader, regarding whom there has been so much discussion in the French press. M. Emile de Girardin has been perpetually asking why that country was not given back to the ex-Emir, to be made into a kingdom by him (under French surveillance), in order that the tangled skeins and Gordian knots of the Algerian question might be thus satisfactorily unravelled. A moment's consideration shows that this would have been an impossibility. From 1832 to 1847 Abd-el-Kader was really powerful, in his own province of Oran, and in his own tribe of the Hachem. He was a Marabout, and being superior to all the rest, was named "Commander of the Faithful," against the unbelievers. At home he was surrounded by his own people, while elsewhere his subordinates were in

reality independent. He often complained of them, but did not change them—because he could not.

To show that the provinces cared but little for his yoke, we have but to cite an instance in connection with the treaty of Tafna (1837). The Emir had by this document ceded the towns of Blida and Colea into the hands of France; but when the French commissioner went thither to take possession, the people refused to surrender them, on the plea that they were not under the Emir's jurisdiction. Marshal Valée, the then governor of the country, was therefore obliged to send troops to occupy them, either by fair means or foul. In this matter, however, Abd-el-Kader was not deceitful, only powerless.*

That which has erroneously been termed the "Government of Abd-el-Kader," was nothing more than a coalition of four provinces, under their own chiefs, who recognized the supremacy of a central chief for unity of action against a common enemy.

Even in his own tribe, and in his own family,

* "Life of Abd-el-Kader," by Bellemare, from documents deposited in the archives of the Minister of War.

the authority of the Emir was sometimes set aside. The following incident is authentic. In December, 1835, the Emir returned to his tribe of the Hachems, beaten by General Clauzel in the passage of the Sidi-Embalek.

"You are no longer our Sultan," said the chiefs around, and they tore his parasol, the emblem of authority. "You are no longer worthy of being a captain," said the cavalry officers, and they dragged the spurs from off his feet. "You are not even a man," echoed the crowd, and they took from him his burnous. "You shall no longer be the husband of our women," and they robbed him of his wife, who went back to her family, and returned to him no more.

They had left him his horse, his wallet, containing a few dried figs, his gun and ammunition, and with these he went silently away. He sat for three days on a hill that overlooked Mascara (where the French army was then stationed), and tying his horse to a group of palms, there meditated and prayed. The French army, having burnt Mascara, retired on Mostaganem; whilst Abd-el-

Kader, protected by the brushwood, carried on a guerilla warfare against such stragglers as departed from the ranks. Later in the day certain chiefs, led on by the love of booty, came up with the French rear-guard, and found their Sultan fighting single-handed against a battalion! These chiefs and their followers, reinforced by successive bands, formed the nucleus of a new army, with which the heroic Emir was soon ready again to attack the whole strength of the invader.

With his "regulars," whom he professed to love like sons, he was not more fortunate than with his tribe. "No money, no soldiers," was a remark often echoed in his ears; and on one occasion he was forced to strip his mother and daughters of all their jewels, to satisfy the demands of those who threatened to abandon him. One day he received an emissary sent by Marshal Valée, to argue with him on the folly of waging war with France.

"You are wrong," said the envoy, "France is powerful, and her army strong in battle."

"All this I know," replied Abd-el-Kader; "but the Khalifas wish for war, and already treat me as

an infidel because it has not yet commenced."

If in a question so grave as this he was forced to submit, against his interests and his will, to a course which he knew to be fatal to his country, surely he was not the man to found a kingdom diametrically opposed to all the principles of the Koran, and to the traditions of the Mussulman religion! He was a great man; but his genius was more strongly called out in fighting against obstacles at home than in facing the columns of his legitimate enemies. He is looked upon in his own country as one that has *failed*—a fatal word in all half-savage lands; and yet he was possessed of the faith that moves mountains, and was armed with the Koran, that gave him strength equal to his faith. He fought against the stranger and the infidel, and had for auxiliaries those who imagined the "Holy War" to be the first duty of the Mussulman. He failed; but must still be considered great, even amongst the great, in not shrinking from a task so beset with rivalry, and jealousy, and intrigue.

At Bordj-bou-Aréridj, where we found a decent

inn, we met with great difficulties in the way of pursuing our journey. The purveyors of mules were even more impracticable than usual. They crowded into our little room, bringing with them the odours of garlic, and talked all at once in voluble Arabic. As they would not accede to our terms, we swept them out without ceremony, and applied to the Commandant-Supérieur of the Bureau Arabe for assistance. One of his men, a sleek and oily individual, with a plausible countenance, hinted that he could provide the required animals if it was made worth his while. We could not make out how many days' journey we were from Algiers, as one Arab said four, another three, and a third seven. In fact, we had long learned the bitter lesson not to believe an Arab's word in any matter whatever—to place no dependence on any statement he may make relative either to time or distance. Driven to our wit's end among them all, we ultimately closed with the last offer, and resolved to push on as far as possible that very day, as we were all panting for the flesh-pots of civilization. For my own part, I

longed with an intense desire, feeling dreadfully ill and knocked-up. We had commenced the controversy with the Arabs at half-past eight A.M., and it was two o'clock before we were able to start.

At length we did manage to get off, on mules that looked doubtful at the beginning, but which turned out eventually even worse than we had anticipated. Our way led through chains of Scotchy-looking mountains, with a snow-range rising clear behind. The road was bad, impeded with rocks and dwarf-palms, but our guide strode steadily in front, and we pushed on as best we might. The "thorn" was now beginning to make himself actively objectionable (he had been so passively throughout the expedition), evidently trying to delay us by every means in his power, in order that his services might be necessary to us for a few days longer. Seven francs a-day is seven francs a day all the world over, and he began to show that he thought so.

We offered a steady and stubborn opposition, however, to everything he proposed, and

thereby reached Algiers, the haven of rest, considerably before we should have done so had we followed his baneful advice. He recounted dismal tales about the dangers of the road, and pointed out a wayside hovel as good accommodation for the night. The prospect seemed so uninviting, that we determined to push on for something better, in spite of lions or robbers, or any other drawback; and on we went accordingly, scrambling down ravines, and struggling over rocky eminences, until at last, about nightfall, we came upon an Arab encampment, with rude stone huts, among which the horses were picketed. We were received with small signs of hospitality, or rather not received at all. Being armed with letters from the Bureau Arabe, we got off our mules and, at the peril of the Kaid of the district, demanded shelter. As both Kaid and chief, however, were absent, and there was no one to command, we should probably have stood all night waiting, had we not taken the law into our own hands. We entered the cleanest hut we could find, and demanding a carpet, fire, and food, established

ourselves for the night. They were a rude, surly lot, and seemed more than ready to turn on us; but the sun had by this time sunk, and there was nothing for it but to stay where we were. The hut we had chosen was already occupied by a few Arabs, travellers like ourselves.

I felt so ill that I could stand no longer, and lay down in the corner most sheltered from the wind, supported by a saddle and a little straw. The motley crowd around stared at me without moving —evidently a sick European was a new sight for them—and I lay quite still, and stared back at them. The whole hut, which consisted of but one room, with a door, for a wonder! was literally heaped with natives, who lay everywhere, squabbling and arguing incessantly, their voices rising sometimes to a howl, and dying away again into whispers, interrupted occasionally by shrieks, which startled me and my companions. Near me sat a lovely delicate-looking boy, about ten years old, the son of the Kaid, who leaned his cheek on his thin hand, and gazed at me with melancholy eyes, of that mournful depth which tells of pre-

mature decay. They were fringed with long lashes, shaded by singularly fine eyebrows, and, notwithstanding their unutterable sadness, were very beautiful. All the Arabs of the mountains have regular features, but this boy added the richness of the Moorish type to the delicacy of complexion peculiar to our own country. He seemed a great favourite among the tribe—all boys indeed are so—while the girls are kicked and cuffed, and made to work incessantly. We had scarcely taken our places, when we received a message from the women in the tents, that we could not have the milk and fowls we had demanded without payment beforehand—a manifestation of Arab distrust that was eminently characteristic. We paid at once, therefore, and cast the bodies of the luckless birds, still warm, into the seething pot upon the fire. The Arabs, as usual, sat around, jabbering and chanting songs while their koos-koos was preparing, or telling long legends and spinning interminable yarns, to wile away the time. At last they rolled themselves up, and snored in chorus. It was a curious sight, as I tossed fever-

ishly, to watch the moonbeams playing through the open door on this mass of humanity lying in heaps, all wrapped in snowy draperies, like a lot of corpses awaiting burial.

By dawn I was quite unfit for further exertion, with high fever and inflammation of the lungs. I was put upon my mule, nevertheless, as it was physically impossible that we should remain where we were. We had now again penetrated into the heart of the Kabyle country, and were marching towards the south side of the great Djerjura range, which we had skirted two months before. Our ambition was to hurry with all the speed we could muster through the "Portes de Fer," celebrated in the history of the Kabyle War, and reach Beni-Mansour, a Bureau Arabe station, where we expected to find an army-surgeon and medicines.

About midday I broke down completely, though dosed incessantly with quinine. The doctor therefore resolved to try a new method of transport—holding me across his saddle, while a native led the mule. This arrangement seemed promising enough, until the brute, aggrieved probably at being over-

burdened, seized the opportunity of a deep and muddy watercourse to lie down, precipitating the doctor and myself into the turbid stream, and rolling on us by way of completing our punishment. The Arabs raised a cry of dismay at the accident, but stood on the bank and offered no assistance, till one of them, more intelligent, or, perhaps, less stupid than the rest, extricated us from our difficulty; an office which we were unable to perform for ourselves, as I was more than half insensible, and the Doctor had taken the precaution of firmly strapping me to himself, to prevent my slipping from the saddle.

After an uneasy journey, under a burning sun, we reached the "Grande Porte," a gorge or passage in the mountains, very wild and deserted, though not particularly picturesque. We now crossed the river for the seventh or eighth time that weary day, and passing the hot sulphur-springs, which sicken the air with their vaporous fumes, penetrated into a narrow defile among the rocks, full of holes and crannies—fit abiding-place for wild beasts—shaded here and there by gnarled

and stunted junipers. At the end of this defile was a hut, built of rough stones, and surrounded by tents, in which dwelt a French surveyor, engaged in making the road from Algiers to Sétif. This gentleman, a M. Plateau, took compassion on the invalid, giving up his own bed for my accommodation. It was now dark, and the jackals were howling in melancholy concert. M. Plateau's dog ran into the hut, and refused to be enticed out again by any manner of endearment. The horses and mules betrayed uneasiness; and an aged Arab shook his head, for he knew by the jackal's cry that a lion was at hand. Our host corroborated this information, stating, moreover, that in the neighbouring villages it was the custom to fasten a young goat nightly on a particular spot for the lion's private entertainment; and that if this precaution were neglected, his majesty of the forest was pretty certain to make a raid on one or another of the villages, and make havoc among the flocks. It is curious that the lion seems positively averse to human flesh if he can get anything else. One of our men related that he had three times come in

contact with lions, himself unarmed, and had always escaped scot-free.

The next day I was too ill to stir a limb, so M. Plateau sent down to the neighbouring Sheikh for a party of men, in order that I might be carried on an impromptu litter as far as Beni-Mansour, which was said to be only six hours distant. My companions made a slight *détour* to visit the "Petite Porte," a gorge unprecedented for its wildness in the whole of North Africa. I, who was delirious, and more than half unconscious, had no more appreciation of what I saw than a log.

We crossed a great plateau, the scene of one of the numberless horrid incidents in the Kabyle war. The village that crowns the hill was struck with pestilence, and the natives, like the good Samaritans that they are, gathered together all their sick, and laid them out in the centre of the plain to die! Fancy the dutiful son laying his fevered mother on the burning earth, taking no heed of her prayers for mercy, roughly unclasping the stiffening fingers that clutched his hair. Fancy the stricken child calling in vain on his brutal

father, begging for a little water to assuage his parching thirst. "For what man is there of you, whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone; if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?"

Where were these men's hearts that they could act thus? From the heights above, these fiends watched the lingering process of starvation and of death, looking unmoved on the hideous spectacle of fathers, brothers, sisters, and lovers perishing by inches, in some cases merely from want of care. But this system worked too slowly—the demon Selfishness achieved a triumph! Fearing lest contagion might yet reach them, in spite of all precaution, a general assembly was convoked, and a chosen band sent out, who, under shadow of the night, dug a long deep trench. Into this they shovelled the dead and the living, the dying and the sick—in mingled heaps —and buried all together quickly out of sight. This occurred not yet twelve years ago!

We reached Beni-Mansour soon after mid-day, and were put up by the Bureau Arabe, who occupy

an isolated ex-caravansary, surrounded by a straggling ring of miserable houses. The little army-surgeon was kindness itself, bustling about with mercurial energy, and playing the angel of mercy with mustard poultices and lemonade. He persuaded us to remain quiet an entire day, in order to give me some chance of rapid recovery. Under his care I fully realized all expectations, and was soon able to totter out and look once more on the lovely Djerjura, whose jagged and snowy peaks seemed quite familiar after our wanderings.

Beni-Mansour stands on a high hill commanding a magnificent panorama on every side—the broad river winding far below through a valley green with sprouting barley, and wooded with the soft grey foliage of the olive. I watched the stream in all its windings, glimmering from out the trees like a silver thread, long shadows cast across its placid face, until it disappeared many miles away, lost among rocks and heathery hills. On the lower range, below the snow-capped Tamgout, monarch of the Djerjura, are villages nestling in woods, their white walls and red roofs a

pleasant change after the mud-coloured houses far off in the Sahara. Two villages, which in particular engaged my attention, were the last strongholds of the unconquered tribes before they fell —let us hope, for ever—under civilized dominion. As I sat watching this scene from a sunny knoll, a party of officers came up, returning from the chase. They were well provided with game, for I soon saw strewn around me partridges and ducks, snipe and woodcock, bustards and hares, and an immense wild boar. There is good fishing out here too, at least so the officers say, though I have my suspicions that the rivers contain nothing but barbel. We had some for dinner, and very nasty they were; but what good can come out of these eternally muddy waters? The native Sheikhs are given to the chase, though hawking is their chief delight. The French officers, in their banishment, have little else to do—for there is not much business transacted in the distant stations. They therefore wile away their time in shooting, pressing a few stray Arabs into the service as beaters, an office not much relished by these lazy gentle-

men, on account of the danger to their legs from their scanty clothing, and the chance of perhaps beating up a lion or a panther by mistake.

Having stayed a full day with our hospitable hosts, we began to make ready for a fresh start, in spite of their kind endeavours to detain us. This time I was to try a new method of transit, in the shape of an "ambulance mule," that is to say, a beast with a chair suspended on each side, like the panniers used for babies. These conveyances are sent on to the battle-fields for the purpose of bearing the wounded to the temporary hospitals. I was packed on one side, while a Savoyard soldier balanced me on the other. It was not a successful arrangement, as the mule fell down once, and the pannier in which I sat came off, precipitating me into the mud. We skirted the foot of the Great Djerjura all day, and arrived at nightfall at a horrible caravansary belonging to a Frenchman. It is the greatest delusion to give the preference to French caravansaries. All the best are taken by the Arabs, and if the tourist carries his own commissariat (as he ought to do), he will be much

better off with them than in the crazy domiciles allotted to the Europeans. This one, the caravansary of Bordj-Bouira, is a case in point. It is a crazy, dirty, ruinous edifice, infested by a number of howling watchdogs. We had a horrible dinner here, and though the room was damp, only a scanty supply of firewood. The place, too, swarmed with armies of bugs and fleas. Clean straw and a bare floor would have been infinitely preferable to the specious bed and suspicious curtains.

The district of Bouira is rising into importance through the cultivation of tobacco. This article is in ever-increasing demand. In 1857 there were 12,500 acres under cultivation, which brought in 1,500,000 lbs. of tobacco, valued at about six million francs. In the province of Algiers there are 8,000 acres devoted to the culture of tobacco.

On the first establishment of the colony, the mother country refused to take in Algerian grain, on the plea that French agriculture must be protected. The European colonists, therefore, unable to sell their corn, looked about for some remedy to

their situation, and found it in the introduction of cotton and tobacco. France consumes from eighty to ninety cwts. of Algerian tobacco per annum, using it principally for the adulteration of the American product, as it is coarse in quality, and slightly bitter, though an intrinsically good article. Its cultivation will not become an important feature in Algerian commerce for some years to come, as it requires large capital and great experience to make it pay at all.

Once more in the saddle, and, as far as we could make out, near our journey's end. The point to be attained was Dra-el-Mizan, the centre of the French colony, but whether it was three hours' distant, or thirteen, we were at a loss to discover. The way leads through picturesque woods of giant olives, down precipitous descents, and up winding bridle-paths. At a turn of the road we came once more unexpectedly upon Tamgout (the highest mountain of the Djerjura range), now rising sheer and solitary; and very fine he looked, his snowy head tipped with the rays of early sunlight, his lower part surrounded by culti-

vated land or buried beneath darkling woods. The cultivated land is well worked, bearing furrows that tell of European labour, instead of the scratching of the Oriental plough.

At one o'clock we found ourselves quite suddenly at Dra-el-Mizan, proving once more, if so patent a fact requires proof, how little Arab intelligence is to be depended upon. It is a lovely, peaceful spot—quite an African Arcadia. The little village nestles at the foot of the big snow-mountain, on a plain of pasture-land, reminding me strongly of Switzerland, in its mixture of mountain scenery with flourishing homesteads and well-to-do farms. It possesses a barrack containing a garrison of a thousand men, as a safeguard for the tranquillity of Western Kabylie. Its population consists of agriculturists, about 160 in number, large proprietors some of them. We paused at the little rustic inn to make inquiries as to our route, and resolved to push on, if possible, as far as the Algerian high-road, which was said not to be many miles distant. We journeyed on, therefore, through scenery that seemed familiar to us, and enjoyed

the green, luxurious vegetation, which appeared doubly enchanting after the sand and mud which we had lately passed through. When darkness came on, as there was no moon, our way became one of difficulty. Round us echoed the dismal howlings of jackals, reminding us unpleasantly of the possible vicinity of panthers. At length we reached the high-road, and the ponderous gates of a caravansary, after a ride of thirteen hours. The gates were long in giving us admittance, and only turned slowly on their hinges to show that the interior had lately been destroyed by fire. Here was a dilemma! We found out upon inquiry that one dwelling-room was still standing, so we made the best of a bad job, and bivouacked after the most approved fashion of "chez les Arabes." The morrow brought the welcome bells of the diligence, and after a drive of eight hours we caught sight of Algiers, with its tranquil blue waters plashing lazily on the strand, and its white houses warmed with the departing glory of the setting sun.

PART IV.

Oran.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BLIDA AND TENIET-AL-HAD.

THE first of April saw us once more on our travels, bent on penetrating through the Western province to Oran. This is a journey seldom undertaken by tourists, as there is but little to satisfy the lover of the picturesque. At the same time, it is a district that will rise sooner or later into great importance, on account of the natural richness of the soil, and its adaptability to the cultivation of cotton and tobacco.

The ten o'clock train from Algiers dragged its weary length along through the plains of the Mitidja as far as Blida. This is the only piece of railway as yet completed, and a wretched specimen it is of that method of locomotion. The route lay

through a fertile expanse of pastures and waving corn, with here and there a grove of trees or wooded water-course, and a perfect constellation of little white villages dotting the landscape up to the horizon. The train wound along the coast for some distance, giving us a farewell view of Algiers and its bay, and passing on the left the orphanage of Ben-Alloun, the first established in this country. There are now many such establishments, placed under regular boards and Government supervision. The orphanage of Ben-Alloun is in every respect an admirable institution. It contains 300 inmates, exclusively boys, who are fed, educated, and clothed at a very moderate expense to the society. Ninepence a-day is the calculated average for every child under ten years of age; eightpence for those between the ages of ten and fifteen; and fivepence for those between fifteen and nineteen. The ratio is so arranged because, as he grows older, the orphan is enabled to work off a part of his expenses for living. The system of education embraces all the primary branches usually taught.

The pupils are afterwards apprenticed with agriculturists, or adopt any trade they may prefer. For a boy of about sixteen, the following is the distribution of the working-day: Eight hours of manual labour, two of class, eight and a half of sleep, and five and a half devoted to religious exercises, meals, and recreation. Children under the age of ten do no manual labour, their time being divided between the primary branches of instruction and gymnastics. On leaving the orphanage each pupil is given £4 to begin the world with, and also such sums as shall have accrued to him as prizes for good conduct. All such as are willing to settle in Algeria receive a concession of a few acres, the number of which varies according to the nature of the soil.

As we approached Blida, the air became sensibly colder, while the mountains, in the midst of which the town is situated, looked ominously snowy and unpleasant after the heat of Algiers. It is a common-place little town, almost entirely French, and owes its popularity as a summer abode to its

picturesque position amid groves of orange-trees, whose perfumed and shady alleys have obtained for it, in the ornate language of the Arabs, the title of "the rose."

The sights of Blida are not numerous. Nevertheless, as the driver of the carriage we had engaged, who had undertaken to do its honours, insisted on our going through the whole town regularly, in spite of sheets of rain, we armed ourselves with umbrellas, and were fain to submit. First we were taken to the "Tapis Vert," a sort of summer theatre, now bare and tenantless. What more dismal than a place like this, that tells only of the questionable glories of the past? Old play-bills—old beer stains—old orange-peel—stale and dirty *débris* of the year before—the entire place silent and deserted—a ghost of splendours long since vanished. I walked on the stage, and looked at its tawdry ornaments, pale and faded in the garish light of day. I listened to the rain splashing monotonously through the roof, watched it trickling between the beams, or falling with a heavy

thud upon the greasy boards, and rushed with a shudder from the place.

Our coachman appeared astonished as well as hurt at our want of appreciation of the amusement he was preparing for us, but persevered in his endeavours, and carried us off for a drive through the dripping "Orangerie," which is really very pretty, reminding me somewhat of Cannes and Nice. The sun struggled out at last on a regular forest of dark-leaved orange-trees, some of them from twenty to thirty feet in height. The branches of various trees, straggling into the road, formed a wonderful tangle of luxurious vegetation, fig and vine, the yellow-eyed narcissus and graceful blue convolvulus, trailing and creeping over each other in beautiful confusion, their fresh spring colouring contrasting with that of the sombre foliage above. We soon arrived at the gates of the Bois Sacré, a public garden of some extent, which owes its beauty to a grove of giant olives, under whose shade lie the bones of some saintly Marabout, covered by a white dome. In

this garden are massed an incongruous crowd of flowering shrubs, which trail about at their own sweet will, uncurbed by the hand of man. They intertwine and form a thicket of gorgeous colour, rendered all the more striking by contrast with the great grey olives, whose gnarled and knotted stems are buried amid the blossoms of the jessamine and the white trumpet-bells of the datura: youth and age tenderly embracing one another—the silver locks of hoary Lear encircled by a wreath of flowers. A glimpse of plashing fountains sparkles now and then through a fragrant curtain of sweet-smelling plants, soothing the place into a drowsy stillness, in which the ever-flitting shadows are the only signs of life and motion.

We had now "done" everything that Blida has to offer in the way of lions, and turned our steps, or rather our carriage, towards the Hôtel de la Régence, a tolerable inn, clean, but very dear. As we drove through the streets, we came upon ever-recurring signs of the late earthquake; houses

split from top to bottom, and clumsily plastered up; tents pitched here and there, the occupants awaiting the rebuilding of their tenements. The barracks suffered considerably on that occasion, as also did the hospital. There is a garrison of five hundred men, besides the civil population of eight thousand souls.

In spite of the dulness of the following day, we engaged a carriage for a drive to the gorge of La Chiffa, an exceedingly picturesque ravine in the mountains of the Lesser Atlas; and penetrated, therefore, through the country of the Mitidja along a good high-road bordered with planes and almonds. Beyond these avenues of delicate spring verdure, which shone out in bright relief against a background of deep-blue hills, lay stretches of pasture-land, dazzling with buttercups and poppies, and loaded with a perfect carpet of wild flowers. These plains occupy an area of about thirty leagues, and are bounded on two sides by mountain chains, and on the third by the sea. The point to which all the interests of the Mitidja

converge is naturally Algiers; the disposition of the roads being a sufficient proof of this fact. On the map they bear the aspect of the bones of a huge fan, united in the great centre of communication, which embraces all the towns and villages at the mountains' base.

By degrees we left the flats behind us, and plunged into a gorge between two ranges of thickly-wooded mountains, feathered with trees down to the very edge of the roaring torrent at the bottom. The road winds along the edge of the rock, on the verge of a precipice some three hundred feet above the water, and the scene changes at every turn of the way from rich woods to bald cliffs, rising two thousand feet above the river's level, and then again to inlets and ravines, with spouting cascades and dashing waterfalls.

About half way through the pass we came on a tiny auberge, placed picturesquely on the hill, half embosomed in freshly springing leafage—a pretty little cottage, with adjuncts of stream and fountain, sheltered under the pale green tracery of early-

budding willows. Here we took coffee in the dim half-light of an arbour, and then scrambled through the dense vegetation up the bed of a small burn, which fell roaring and foaming from boulder to boulder, and rock to rock, dashing in sparkling spray over the ferns that touched its waters, and dragging in its descent a wealth of leaves, which whirled and twisted in the eddies, and played for a brief space in chequered sunlight, finally dancing out of life beneath the mossy stones. Great trailing strings of ivy were interlaced across the stream; and long-armed branches of the fig, immense dock-leaves and thorny naked boughs, all tangled and twisted together, were reflected with vivid truth in the beryl darkness of the pools. Up this stream we struggled, now clinging to a friendly tree, now stumbling over a slippery rock, until at last one more formidable than the rest compelled us to turn back and retrace our steps, without meeting with a single specimen of the small grey monkeys that dwell in these woody solitudes.

Once more in our carriage we followed the high-road, coming at every turn on something new and striking, till at length we reached the "Five Cascades," a series of waterfalls that fray themselves a passage through the surrounding bushes, almost from the summit of the mountain. The day had been so far dull and cloudy, threatening rain, but now the sun shone forth, bringing out in bright relief the lights and shadows of rock, cave, and mountain. From every available crevice in the stone sprung tendrilled creepers and thick-leaved plants, while the entire surface seemed literally bursting into flower under the magic touch of Spring—the young Spring that, as the lamented Alexander Smith so happily expresses it, "breathes with living breath upon a dead branch till it sprouts fragrantly." Rapidly-flitting clouds flecked the hills with shadow, and tender sprouts of rose and orchis stood out in contrast with the sober evergreens; while at distances along the road were long caravans of picturesque carts, and strings of horses winding slowly round

the hills, toiling their tedious way to the interior.

We drove rapidly back to Blida before sunset, as we had already booked our places in the night diligence as far as Miliana, a journey westward of twelve hours. The unwieldy machine rattled quickly through the night, and about sunrise we obtained our first view of Miliana, a well-to-do town, perched on a high rock flanked with vineyards, overlooking the vast plains of the Chéliff, as far as the distant mountains of Teniet-al-Had.

The entrance into the town is exceedingly pretty, more especially in the golden light of early sunrise. We rumbled through streets of clean European houses, arched over with the interlacing leafage of the plane-tree, amid such cracking of whips and shaking of bells as must effectually have roused the inhabitants from their slumbers. The streets are built in the form of a star, converging to an open place in the centre, in the midst of which stands an ivy-grown campanile

with whitewashed turret. From this point the view is charming—a perspective of green alleys, under whose shade (later in the day) were congregated groups of jabbering natives, squatting on clean mats, discussing fragrant Moka. A crowd of the unwashed, too—*very* unwashed, by the way—were huddled in a corner, clamorously receiving the bounty of the local Sisters of Mercy, in the shape of hunches of good brown bread. They don't improve on acquaintance, these Arabs—sordid and ungrateful thieves! Even while receiving the gift of charity, they bite the hand that feeds them. In this instance they concealed the food that had been given, and urgently demanded more, until convicted of deceit.

There is much destitution among the tribes of this province and in Oran. A great deal is done for them each year at Algiers in the way of subscriptions and bazaars, and yet beggary is alarmingly on the increase, probably because they begin to learn—the miserable wretches—that they will not be allowed to starve. Munching her crust in

the midst of the unsavoury throng was one woman whom it was painful to look at, so near did she come in baseness of countenance to the recognised type of the gorilla; a broad flat face, utterly devoid of intellect, and fearfully developed in the sensual department. The only scintillation of humanity shone out of her eyes. I was all but converted to the Darwinian theory on the spot.

Miliana is a larger town than I expected to see, containing upwards of four thousand inhabitants, inclusive of the garrison, one thousand strong. It stands two thousand feet above sea-level, and is very cheerful and healthy of aspect. We sauntered about among the alleys, looking into the well-stocked shop-fronts, and then out upon the battlements, from which we gained a fine view of flourishing fields and tidily-kept homesteads. Around the town itself everything looks fair enough, thanks to the exertions of a few enterprising colonists, but beyond its immediate circle very little is done.

In the whole immense area of eighty miles between Miliana and Orleansville there are but two European villages. The cause of this is the uncertainty of the crops, in consequence of the uncertain supply of water. Rivers there are in seeming abundance, though not in sufficient numbers to assure a requisite amount of irrigation. Barley and oats are the staple commodities of the plain. In fortunate seasons all surplus produce is sent to swell the markets of Algiers. Tobacco has been tried without success. All sorts of fruit-trees flourish here, as does also the vine, from which good sound wine is made, tasting strongly of the grape—a wholesome article of consumption, which, unfortunately, will not bear carriage. If Miliana ever rises into real importance, it will be through the instrumentality of copper and iron, which are said to abound in the mountains, although they remain as yet unworked.

We wandered on through a formidable display of martial architecture, in the way of barracks and redoubts, and eventually found

ourselves outside the town walls, in the military cemetery—a lovely and peaceful spot. If external beauty is considered desirable for our last resting-place, it is in localities such as this that our bones should repose. It lies on the slope of a hill-side, rich in all the luxuriant profusion of the African flora in full spring-time. The eye wanders over a parterre of wild flowers and golden mosses in endless variety of gorgeous colouring, broken now and then by simple marble slabs and melancholy cypresses. Further down, are the purpling shadows of undulating vineyards; and beyond, a spreading plain, with the river meandering like a thread of silver into the distance, and a delicate hazy line of far-off hills, broken by an immense rugged mountain, tipped with snow —"l'œil du monde"—standing alone in solitary majesty. A spot that tells of peace and rest. I see it now, smiling in the sunlight. I still hear in fancy the buzzing of the insects, and watch the lilies bend their stately heads at the bidding of the bee, as she toils busily on, unheedful of the silent

dead. How pleasant to see so much solicitude for those that have gone before! No sculptured tomb or high-flown epitaph—no vaunting list of virtues—no costly tears, forgotten as soon as shed—but only a plain stone or humble cross, encircled by well-trimmed roses, mementoes that tell of the tender hands which forget not the departed; each little garden so neat and weedless, in fitting contrast to the lavish gifts of tangled flowers bestowed by loving nature. "Sacred to the memory of Eulalie Prudhom, aged seven." Such a pretty bed she rests in, under the soft shade of a guardian cypress, amid great white marguerites and blue forget-me-nots, while a parting ray of dying sunset kisses the place in which she sleeps. Sleep on, little Eulalie, under the jewelled sod! The orchid and wild rose shall sway above thy head, the beetle and the bee boom a lullaby over thy grassy sepulchre, and the giant mountain watch over thy slumbers, till the blast of the angel's trumpet shall go forth into all lands, gathering us together from the North

and the South, the East and the West, before the tribunal of Eternity!

Sunrise the following morning saw us off on an excursion to the forest of Teniet-al-Had, which was to occupy three days. We had engaged a primitive kind of cart, with moveable seats, drawn by two horses, and were not sorry to turn our backs for a brief space on the damp beds and execrable accommodation of the Hôtel d'Isly. Driving slowly down the hill on which the town is built, we found ourselves surrounded on all sides by tidy cottages and enclosed gardens, plantations of fruit-trees, and many flour-mills. Once upon level ground, we emerged upon the plain of the Chéliff, through which runs the river of the same name, the largest in Algeria. At length we passed through a forest of tamarinds, and rising once more into the hill-country, came upon a party of convicts busy on the roads—most awful roads, much in need of their services, being in some places all but impassable. Our vehicle jolted bravely on, however, now falling into a deep rut,

and sticking there, now bumping painfully over rocky eminences, to the imminent danger of the springs, and all but upsetting us in more than one instance. We saw a hungry jackal prowling about the road close to us, slouching and shuffling along like one of our own street ruffians at home; and like them, too, he shambled off at our approach. Up hill and down hill, at one time we wound over the ledge of a precipice, at another skirted the stony bed of the river, moving steadily upwards all the time, till we penetrated into a wild glen, wooded with great ilexes and the juniper-like foliage of the *thuya*. Peaks of rock rose from the thick leafage in gaunt weird forms, the silence broken only by a rippling stream that sparkled in silver light through gaps in the superabundant vegetation. A few eagles circled in the clear air high above our heads—the only signs of life—not a house, or a village, or a human habitation for miles and miles. All the woods through which we passed were low and stunted, with here and there a blasted trunk, telling of what

might have been but for the Arab practice of burning the underwood by way of improving the grass for grazing purposes.

Government has been compelled to put a stop to the use of the forests as pasture grounds, except in those localities where no injury can be done to the trees. This, of course, gives a mighty handle to those who look upon the Arabs as an oppressed and ground-down people; but there is no other course to be pursued, to check the yearly devastations of the woods. Indeed, the measures at present taken are wholly inadequate to the urgent demands of the case.

In 1862 certain tracts of forest-land were assigned to French companies,* to be worked and

* The official report states that in December, 1862, the State parted with the following concessions:—

On a lease of 99 years (cork trees)	298,717	acres.
,, ,, 40 ,, ,,	43,975	,,
Provisionally . . ,,	34,902	,,
On a lease of 18 years.....(oak).....	44,887	,,
On a long term.....(olive).....	15,840	,,
Total.....	438,322	acres.

managed by them; and, during the first year, they expended capital to the extent of twenty-five francs the acre on the ground conceded to them. From that period there have been annual fires, evidently the work of incendiaries, which have gone far to ruin the enterprising colonists, and which as yet it has been impossible to check. The Duke of Malakoff, when Governor of Algeria, imposed a fine of 100,000 francs on the tribes in whose neighbourhood the fires took place; but the fines were never paid, and the Arabs have thus been encouraged, rather than the reverse, in their mischievous and wicked work. Some writers have attributed the disasters to accident, spontaneous combustion, &c.; but this is very improbable, when we consider that the conflagrations take place at many different points simultaneously, and always when a sirocco wind is blowing. Native possessions never suffer.

From time immemorial it has been the custom of the Arab herdsmen to burn all underwood from beneath the trees, to produce the tender shoots of

which cattle are so fond; and under Turkish misrule it was a matter of small consequence whether a hundred acres of valuable timber were destroyed or not. Now matters have taken a new aspect. The forests are the property of the State, and as such are to be protected from all dangers, in order that in times to come they may yield a valuable export, and increase the revenues of Government. A law was issued in 1830, interdicting in the strongest terms the burning of underwood by fire; and until the granting of the concessions above named, these fires were of comparatively rare occurrence. The Arabs are jealous of the working of the woods, to which they for generations have had the exclusive right, and attempt by every means at their disposal to ruin their European rivals and drive them from their posts.

It is even a matter of some difficulty to set fire to cork-woods (whose bark is fire-proof), and requires the science of incendiarism. During the struggle with Abd-el-Kader, the French soldiers attempted to burn the wood of Khareza, but were

unable to do so; and yet last year this wood was (accidentally?) all but destroyed by fire. Another fact worthy of remark is that, during all the great conflagrations in the three provinces, there has been no harm done in territory under Kabyle influence, for that race consists of men and arboriculturists.

To give some notion of the enormous spread of these conflagrations, I have but to quote from the newspaper reports of 1865:—

"In 1863, 110,000 acres were burnt in the province of Constantine alone; whilst, in 1865, the damage done amounted to 258,755 acres. In the small district of Jemappes, the concessionists were losers to the extent of 3,000,000 francs.

"In the *arrondissement* of Guelma, 35,600 acres were destroyed; whilst the bathing establishment of 'Meskhroutin,' hard by, was in constant danger of destruction for several weeks.*

"The forest of Tefeschoon was burnt straight

* *Moniteur de l'Algérie. Journal Officiel.* 31st August, 1865.

down to the sea, and the colonist there established, a M. Portès, was ruined. He had been engaged in the cork-trade, and had expended about fifty francs per acre, for six years, on the necessary treatment of his trees. According to his calculation, the produce of 1866 and 1867 should have reimbursed him for all capital laid out, and the following crops have produced an annual return of 18,000 francs. But fire destroyed this smiling prospect. 165,000 trees (out of 200,000) were all ruined, and the remainder much injured. He lost everything, with the exception of thirty acres, which escaped the flames."

The actual position of the Government in relation to the colonists, as far as concerns woods and forests, is this:—

The State calls her companies around her, and thus announces her policy:—"I have forests in Algeria which are at present impracticable through lack of roads. As I wish these forests to grow and prosper, I will place them in enterprising hands. I am willing, therefore, to let them out for long

terms, and at moderate charges, on the condition that roads are made, brushwood cleared away, and spaces filled up. I guarantee on my side the free enjoyment of that which I am willing to let."

Although these conditions impose considerable outlay at first on those to whom the concessions are made, yet there are found no lack of tenants to accept them. A contract is thereupon signed by the representatives of the State and the representatives of the companies, by which the former alienates from herself the temporary enjoyment of the forests, while she remains primary proprietor of trees and soil; and the latter become farmers, who pay a rent from the moment the trees commence to yield a produce, and up to that time are bound to lay out considerable sums to create a value where otherwise there would be none.

The Thuya tree flourishes in great quantities in many of the forests of Algeria, and will one day become a mine of wealth, though at present it is rendered useless by difficulty of transport. It has a grain similar to that of bird-eye maple, but much

finer in colour, and admitting of a superior polish. Bombonel, the celebrated lion-killer, being entertained one day by a chief far up in the hills, was much horrified at seeing logs of this valuable wood heaped up on the fires. He requested that some of the logs might be laid aside, and carried them with him to Paris, where they were quickly transformed into a beautiful cabinet, which was ultimately sent as a gift to the distant chief, to show him the use to which his fire-wood might be applied. Bombonel was not a practical man, or he would have perceived that the expense to which he had been put for the instruction of the chief exceeded by a hundredfold the real value of the timber! But be this as it may, we shall one day see much of it in use for the adornment of our ladies' chambers.

Meanwhile we were jolting along over a stony causeway, until the improved condition of the road warned us of approaching civilization. Accordingly about sunset the town of Teniet-al-Had came into view—a straggling street of little houses, large barracks, and a church; with a

fountain and tank for watering cattle, and a few trees planted on each side. The soldiers' quarters are enclosed within a strong line of bastions, and it is the presence of these regiments that keeps the surrounding and not too-submissive tribes in subjection. All the inhabitants turned out to stare at us as we jogged up the street. The arrival of strangers was quite an excitement in their blank lives, poor creatures! The sun had been scorchingly hot all day; indeed the skin was peeling off my face from its effects; but on our arrival at Teniet we became sensible of a sudden change, which did not surprise us, considering that it stands some 3,500 feet above sea-level, in the heart of the highest range in the whole province.

The object of our journey was to visit the vast forest of cedars for which these hills are famous. So immediately on our arrival at the door of the little inn, we made particular inquiries as to the means of conveyance to our point of destination. We learned that the forest was only two or three hours' ride from the town, over a road that was quite im-

practicable for a vehicle with springs, and therefore determined to take to horses if decent beasts were to be obtained. Our landlord undertook all the responsibility, and packed us off at early dawn the following day, on really very respectable quadrupeds. On our way we passed crowds of Arabs coming in to market, some on horses with red high-peaked saddles, and some on foot, driving before them herds of fine fat sheep and oxen.

We mounted up into the hill-country, ascending higher and higher, till Teniet appeared like a spot on the green hill-side. We wound along a primitive road, shaded by beautiful ilexes that shone out crisp and silvery in the morning air. The masses of verdure through which we made our way were studded with narcissus and daffodil, and broken by cold grey rocks warmed up with golden moss. At length a few cedars, sprinkled about among the other trees, gave signs of what was to come, and by degrees all the others gave place to the monsters of the forest. As we mounted higher and higher the scene be-

came grand and savage in the extreme. We stood on a shelving ledge of rock with a sheer fall of four hundred feet into the valley below. The depth appeared even greater than it really was, as the bottom was hidden from view. We looked down upon the tops of the feathery trees, beneath which was an uncertain gloom of shadow, while across the deep valley lay an expanse of precipitous mountain side, of a dark and sombre green, varied here and there by a patch of open ground. Great bare rocks peeped now and then from out the obscurity below us, and beyond spread a vast panorama of indistinct mountains, pale and blue in the haze of early morning.

A further ride of about half an hour brought us to the "Grand Point," a large flat open space of meadow-land on the brow of a hill in the centre of the forest. Here we dismounted and sat down under the shade of some enormous cedars to take in the view—a truly lovely scene, which we contemplated with delight.

Far down, below, were undulating woods of

grey-green foliage, merged in the distance in the stretch of mighty hills. Bald peaks of Titanic masonry melted away, range behind range, into an imperceptible jagged line, which gradually disappeared in the heavens in a veil of mist. Above and around, rough-barked trees of giant growth, the fanlike branches of which descended to the ground, loaded the air with heavy perfume. A wilderness of leaves and flowers which grew about the roots of the great cedars, contrasted in warm brilliancy of colour with the sober branches and stems which rose above them. Here and there amongst them towered a few ghastly trunks, gaunt and bare, like lean, pale ghosts of tortured Dryads lifting their arms as if to avert the vengeance of the gods. There was not a breeze to stir the boughs, or a sound to break the stillness, save the drowsy hum of insects, or the soft tip-tapping of the woodpecker. We sat in a perfect maze of vegetation; the golden buttercup and yellow-eyed daisy nodding over the bells of the narcissus, or nestling against the deep-toned

violet heartsease, whilst the sod was alive with myriads of little creatures that sparkled like gems in the grass. To the right and left were smiling glades, fresh and green in contrast with the sombre foliage, dotted about with lichened rocks, and specked with many a sunborn flower. Great monarchs of the forest lay prone across the open, toppled from their thrones, and half buried in luxuriant leaves, as though kind earth were grieving over their fall, and seeking to shroud with reverent hand their desecrated heads. Many a painted butterfly, too, skimmed out of the dim shadow, and bright little lizards darted hither and thither under the cool refuge of the stones. But "nulle rose sans épines." A great serpent, some six feet long, green and glistening, wriggled noiselessly across our path, warning us that the velvet conceals the claw.

Our little guide was an Italian boy, who whipped his horse most unmercifully, and was brimful of legends and anecdotes of terror. As we rode along, he volunteered a story to amuse us on the

way, and, among other alarming relations, narrated the following old Arab tale:—

"On the banks of the Guadalquiver, under a solitary arbutus, sat a melancholy Arab, deploring his destiny.

"'Oh! why,' he cried, 'was I dragged to the Holy War, only to witness the massacre of my tribe? What have I done to have been led into captivity? Perchance my children by the lake Alloula are sitting with their mother in hopes of my return; watching daily for the approach of a jaded horseman; turning away and sighing at sunset, "He will come to-morrow." Alas! for the slave under the yoke of Spain, who perishes accursed on Christian soil, far away from the bones of his forefathers!'

"Thus he sat sighing and weeping away his life, when suddenly he looked up and perceived through his tears an old man, a venerable patriarch, with book and inkhorn, wearing the sombre dress of a Spanish teacher.

"'Arab, speak,' said he; 'know you the Chris-

tian's tomb in the far-off land where sleep the bones of the fair Florinda? Mistress she was of Roderic, the last Gothic king, who, finding herself deserted by him, appeared on the coast of Africa, rousing the tribes to battle, and pointing to the shores of Spain. She told of the wealth of Spanish cities, and of the beauty of Spanish maidens, and so inflamed the warm blood of the Orientals, that they rose *en masse*, and conquered the Christians in open fight. Seeing the crescent shine above the cross, and the Gothic circlet added to the turban of the conqueror, the fair one was overcome with remorse at the extent of her revenge, and pined slowly away in the land of her voluntary exile. She would neither eat nor speak, but sat listless on the cliffs of Cherchell, watching dreamily in the ebbing waters the sleeping city buried below its depths—the city of Ion, whose glory has departed, swallowed in the envious tide. At length she died, and was buried beneath a costly monument, which stands on the brow of Cherchell's heights. Arab, do you know

this tomb, in your native land far away?—do you wish to see your wives again, and embrace your children?'

"'Stranger—mock me not,' replied the Arab, slowly. 'Such joy is forbidden to me by Allah's decree; blessed be His name! Why make sport, old man, of a slave's regrets? To insult the conquered is unworthy of the brave.'

"'Listen, O son of the Prophet; if you will, your chains shall fall, you shall see your sons, your Ourida, the babe you left behind. You shall tread once more your native soil, and breathe the air of the eternal mountains; but will you pay the price that I demand?'

"'Everything, O Thaleb,' cried the frenzied Moor, 'even to the salvation of my soul.'

"'Go, then, you are free; but when you reach your distant home, take two days holiday to celebrate your return, and the third devote to gratitude. Go you alone at dawn to the Christian's tomb, and there burn this parchment. Remember your promise, or beware!'

"Ben Cassim promised, swearing loudly by the sepulchre of Mahomet; but his vows were wasted on the woundless air, for the mysterious old man had vanished.

* * * * * * *

"The sun was sinking in the west as he neared his peaceful home. The smoke was curling straight up into the air as he approached the well-remembered tents. He sank on his knees in the fading twilight, and watered the earth with his tears.

"'Come to me, wife; embrace me, oh! my children! I have returned at last once more from foreign bonds. Many a time in Spanish irons have I prayed to clasp my dear ones yet again. Allah, thou art great, thou hast heard my supplications! And Ourida, my daughter, flower of the earth, how brilliant are thine eyes! Come, and nestle on my knee, while I gather round me the friends that I love, and the brethren of my race.'

"During two whole days white koos-koos smoked

beneath the tent, and coffee blackened the perfumed cups with its aromatic liquor. Soothing tobacco went the round of all the guests, and negroes danced like demons in the moonlight to the beating of the tom-tom and of iron castanets. But the third day dawned, and the soul of Ben Cassim was mindful of his liberator. He climbed up to the distant mausoleum, which was already touched by the rising sun, its foot buried in soft grass and matted briar, while pious cypresses pointed upward with warning finger through the pure morning ether. The Arab lit a fire without delay, and hastened to destroy the papers given to his keeping. Just as the last spark was dying out, behold! a rumbling below the earth; while from all the crevices in the monument poured forth an endless tide of gold and silver coins, which rolled in torrents down towards the sea, pointing towards Spain. Onward rushed the golden flood, with a sound like the humming of bees when they leave their hives in spring.

"Ben Cassim, at sight of this astounding miracle, turned to flee, but, overcome by avarice, threw his burnous like a net over the departing stream, in hopes of saving a little for himself, and instantly the prodigy ceased—the rain of gold dried up. He was nevertheless a rich man, for his garment was full of shining piastres, although the source of wealth was gone, and he thenceforth paraded the streets on market-days in silken haïk, and burnous spun by Djerid dames. Great talk was there in the cafés on the subject of the miracle, and at length its fame sounded in the ears of royalty itself. The Dey of Algiers heard the story, and hastened to assemble an army of workmen to sweep away the tomb and dig among the rocks; but no sooner had the first iron struck the stone than the sky was darkened, and in the lurid light was seen an awful spectre—the dim figure of a woman, reaching to the clouds, seated on the desecrated sepulchre. She waved her arm menacingly aloft, and crying in a voice that shook the firmament, 'Alloula! Al-

loula!' melted gradually into thin vapour, while from every cranny in the earth came hosts of monster ants, that covered the hills and valleys, driving the workmen into the sea. The Dey of Algiers, his court, and all his ladies who had come to divide the treasure, disappeared; and the husbandman going to his work shakes his head fearfully, quickening his pace the while, as he passes under the shadow of the Christian's Tomb."

The father of our little Italian guide is at present the only concessionist admitted into the forest of Teniet-al-Had. Great care is being taken of it now (a little late, perhaps) by Government. Guards are stationed to protect it from the pilfering hands of Arabs, and only a certain number of trees are allowed to be cut down annually—some twenty or thirty—which are all duly marked beforehand by the officers of Woods and Forests. These trees the concessionist cuts down, and sells as he best can, paying Government ten francs the cubic

metre for the privilege. Transit is difficult and very expensive, through the imperfection of the road, which in some places is no more than a stony path. It is reckoned that the carriage of the wood costs five sous a metre as far as the town alone, a distance of only nine or ten miles! The work is rendered dangerous, too, by the vicinity of hyenas and panthers, while the risk of being bitten by serpents is also very great.

There are mineral springs in the neighbourhood, which bear comparison with those of Spa or Kreuznach. Petitions have been sent periodically in to Government, to pray for the establishment of thermal baths on these valuable sources, but the petitions have as yet only found their way to the waste-paper basket. The efficacy of the waters has been proved in numberless cases among the soldiery with signal success, and it is to be hoped that some day the powers that be will see further into their own interests, and make more of the gifts showered on them by Providence. At present they are a by-

word in the colony. Our driver one day pointed to an ill-ploughed field with the butt-end of his whip, and said, sarcastically, "One would almost think that this was the work of our ministers at home."

The next day we returned to Miliana in the same jolting shanderedan in which we had come. On our way over the mountain roads, we met the picturesque procession of an Arab *douar* changing camping-ground. A troop of natives of both sexes and all ages, straggling in ragged file, toiled onward in the heat, goading before them herds of cattle, whilst women and children in motley throng brought up the rear. Good fat sheep loomed through the dust, and silky goats were wedged tightly among each other. Sturdy bulls bore unwieldy tent-poles and great sacks of heterogeneous woollen stuffs; while little donkeys were half hidden beneath an accumulation of cooking utensils, and cocks and hens roosted complacently on the very summit of the piled-up burdens. Such was the busy crowd that defiled through the shadows of

the trees, jabbering and crooning Arab music, awakening the echoes of the hills. A few sturdy men there were too, on horseback, quietly enjoying their ease, while their weaker halves trotted barefoot in the mire. A gaunt group or two of towering shepherds, some of them naked to the waist, nursed in their arms new-born lambs, reminding one of that other Shepherd who went about to seek and to save that which was lost. It is truly a peculiar trait in the Arab character, their utter disregard of female weakness. The ladies certainly do not excite much compassion. They either march along, a bundle of white clothes, with nothing visible but perhaps a braceleted arm, or shuffle by the side of their lord and master, with dirty brats clinging about their necks, and perspiration pouring in torrents down their paint-raddled physiognomies.

We paid a visit to the abode of our "cocher," at his earnest desire; and a very nice house it was, surrounded with vineyards and fruit-gardens, and commanding a fine view of the Chéliff plains.

Land is cheap out here. He only paid six thousand francs for his little estate of some five acres, which is laid out as a nursery. The house itself cost two thousand francs in building—a nice house of one story, with cool verandah, and lots of accommodation.

CHAPTER XIX.

ORAN AND TLEMCEN.

THE diligence, or rather series of diligences, of the Messageries Impériales carried us in a tiresome journey of three very long days through the plains that stretch from Miliana to Oran. The roads in some places are really awful, and unfit for such unwieldy vehicles as those employed for the purpose. In spite of the seven or eight horses attached to the conveyance, we stuck perpetually in ditch and mire, and were more than once on the eve of a capsize. We were landed the first evening at Orleansville, a pretty little town, with an excellent hotel (rather a *rara avis*, by the way). This town is said to have in store for it a

brilliant future. It will be, when the railroad is completed (in about four years' time), one of the centres of commerce between Algiers and Oran. At present it is in its infancy, not counting more than 2,000 souls.

Soon after leaving Orleansville we entered the province of Oran, which covers an area of 10,000,000 acres, hills and valleys and pasture-ground; while about a seventh of its superficies is occupied by woods and forests. The orographic aspect of the province is remarkable for its regularity, four mountain-chains, one behind the other, running parallel to the sea. The sides of the chains that look towards the water are abrupt and rocky, while those on the southern side slope gradually into long stretches of plain. Many of the mountains have flat horizontal tops, cutting against the African sky, as though their heads had been sliced away.

The climate of Oran is said to be hotter and drier than that of the other provinces. The rainy season is one-third shorter in duration than

in Constantine, and snow is hardly ever known to fall.

This province, too, is by far the richest of the three in mineral wealth. The lead, copper, and iron, which are found about Tlemcen and Gar-Rouban, are reckoned as fine in quality as any that we can show at home. Much translucid onyx and alabaster, dug from the quarries of Sidi-Kassen, has been sent this year to adorn the Paris Exhibition. 5,000 tons of excellent salt are produced annually from the lake of Arzen, and enormous quantities of pottery-earth find their way yearly to the European markets.

The principal trees that form the forests are oak, cedar, thuya, and pine, not forgetting the olive, which grows around Tlemcen into a forest-king, and becomes the staple of a considerable commerce.

The statistical columns of the Government documents, dated 30th June, 1864, gave the following report of the population of the province :—

Europeans :—

Mixed nationalities.....	1,941
French.....	31,519
Spaniards.....	24,208
Germans.....	2,124
Italians	1,033
Total.....	60,825

Indigenous :—

Mussulmans.....	30,075
Negroes	2,595
Israelites	12,347
Total.....	45,017

General recapitulation of entire population :—

Europeans	60,825
Aborigines	45,017
Grand total.....	105,842

In 1859 there were 7620 pupils, European and African, in the different national schools.

So far I have said nothing but what is favourable of the province. In speaking of its commercial status it must be far otherwise. Many efforts have been made, and many expedients have

been tried, but as yet no adequate returns have repaid the zeal and perseverance of the first pioneers of civilization....

In agriculture, having learnt by experience that all cereals, save oats, yielded very uncertain crops, from lack of irrigation, the colonists tried the vine. It has succeeded admirably, particularly in the neighbourhood of Mostaganem and Mascara, but its produce cannot as yet bear comparison with that of the mother country. Cotton, too, is meeting with considerable success; that of Oran has always carried off the prizes in the Government Exhibitions.

But, in order that all these essays may answer expectation, it is indispensable to possess a perfect and direct outlet and means of communication. The railway, it is to be hoped, will be completed some day; but meanwhile the only provincial roads and arteries of commerce are impassable during the rainy season! For want of ports, the entire trade of the province centres in the town of Oran. It is there that grain, wool, oil, skins,

cotton, cattle, and tobacco are exchanged for spun cotton, cotton stuffs, manufactured silks, and wines from France; and consequently there is an enormous practice of extortion in the way of commission and warehousing. The ports of Arzew, of Mostaganem, and of Nemours will eventually become centres of importance; but that will only take place "some day," like so many other things in Algeria!

A wearisome journey of seventeen hours through deserted plains, without a sign of villages or inhabited douars, brought us to Mostaganem, which stands on the sea, on two sides of a ravine. The whole surrounding country is violently contorted, as though by a convulsion of nature. The entire Roman town, indeed, was destroyed by an earthquake in the time of Constantine, and buried with all its inhabitants in the hungry waves. The modern town is important as a depôt for crops and cattle, and boasts of a population of 7,000 souls; but it is quite uninteresting to the tourist. Its best inn, the Hôtel de France, is

filthy in the extreme, and we made all haste out of it, having been almost eaten up in the course of a single night by whole armies of bugs and fleas.

We mounted once more, then, into the banquette of the diligence, and followed the course of the Mediterranean through Arzew to Oran. Little bands of native children rushed out at us as we drove along, crying and shrieking for coppers, and singing the "Sire de Framboisy," which they had been taught by the Conducteur. Most dreadful little savages they looked, as they tore along, with their eyes starting out of their heads, and the long love-lock which is left unshaven, as a "handle up to heaven," flapping in the wind. They all wore the scantiest attire. Some of them had a white linen gondoura, or shirt; but the dress of most consisted of nothing at all, not even spurs or a paper collar —rather startling to modest eyes, considering that some of them were girls! The coachman stopped the carriage, and they were put through

their daily lesson—a mixture of the Lord's Prayer and "Long Live the Emperor," which they gabbled through at a great pace, not understanding a word of what they were saying, but eagerly eyeing the pence and sugar with which they were to be rewarded. We threw them a handful of sous, and continued our onward way.

The country through which we passed was arid and tangled with dwarf-palms; while here and there the fields reclaimed by the colonists showed what might be done were some company to take matters in hand—a fine opening for Messieurs Frémy and Talabot, if they ever sign their treaty with Government.

We suddenly found ourselves in the midst of a plague of grasshoppers—the plague of which we had heard so much all through our travels. The air was full of the great winged insects, which swept over the crops in ravaging columns, leaving everything behind as bare as the palm of the hand. The road was black with their young;

tiny, dingy creatures, fluttering in millions, moving like sand driven by the wind. Hapless colonists, engaged in sweeping them into fires lit at intervals, were burning them up by hundreds. Useless labour!—they breed with fearful rapidity; those that are destroyed are but as a drop in the ocean to those that are continually springing into life. The plague has lasted in this district seven months, and almost everything destructible is already long since destroyed. One can scarcely conceive any one settling in the country as an agriculturist, in the face of so fearful a visitation.

As night was closing in, the town of Oran appeared in sight; and a fine spectacle it presented, with its spreading gulf and frowning cliffs, crowned with ancient Spanish battlements. The port was full of shipping, whose masts and cordage shone black against the sky, while the rocky crags and towers of the Spanish Kasbah loomed grandly through the night. The town itself lies spread about, in a very unsatisfactory

way, over a series of hills and ravines, so that no good view can be obtained of its *ensemble*, and it is impossible to move fifty yards without toiling up an incline, or descending a flight of steps. The good though noisy Hôtel de la Paix received us, and we found ourselves among the fleshpots once more.

A visit to the cotton plantations of the Sig, and a pilgrimage to the town of Tlemcen, were to complete our journey in Algeria. As we still had a day or two to spare, we resolved to devote them to Oran. It was a waste of time, however, as an hour's walk made us acquainted with everything that there was to see. Its most remarkable point, to my thinking, is the large number of Spaniards which it contains. Spanish men in black velvet hats, with handkerchiefs wound round their heads—Spanish women with sparkling eyes and jet-black hair—Spanish posadas and Spanish houses—at times one might fancy oneself in Spain itself; but suddenly there comes round a corner a group of turbaned Jews,

or bedouin-draped Arabs, who instantly dispel the illusion. It is a most uninteresting town, in sooth, with no old buildings or quaint holes and crannies to delight an artist's eye. There is a handsome mosque-front, richly sculptured in Arabesques, and adorned with a plashing fountain; and a queer winding street, with big trees growing in the middle of the road; but beyond this, nothing.

We strolled up the principal streets and out of the fortified gates upon the plain beyond, and presently found ourselves in the native quarter, a regular little town standing by itself at the top of the hill. I have heard much of Irish misery, and have seen the dwellings of the unhappy people on the west coast of Ireland, but I am glad to be able to assert that they are palaces compared with these native hovels, which are built of mud or of plaited branches, and are so wretched that we should consider them unfit for dogs to live in. They stand for the most part in little yards deep in accumulated filth, and some-

times among scrubby hedges of cactus, rich in fetid rags, and choked with noisome water. There were groups of native women grinding corn in their primitive mills, two of them at work at each machine, like those mentioned in the Bible. Little children, too, ran hither and thither, staring at us with big round eyes—queer little imps, with no particular clothing save monstrous ear-rings. The sun was so hot that we could not bear the dazzle of the whitewash, and therefore wandered in search of a cooling breeze out to the brow of the neighbouring hill, where stands a native cemetery, and from which may be obtained a fine view of rocky coast and clear blue water. The tombs of departed Marabouts lie scattered here and there, surrounded by the modest graves of their humbler fellow-countrymen. Many of these graves were sadly desecrated, bearing evident marks of having been rifled by the hyena or the jackal.

Returning slowly across the open space to the European town, we came upon a little colony of Spaniards, charcoal-burners principally, who live

in dwellings hollowed out of the earth, on the side of a bank that slopes towards the sea. From a distance the *tout-ensemble* looks like a rabbit-warren, and it really is not much more, after all. As we stood looking about us, several of the inhabitants emerged from their holes to gaze at us, and as quickly disappeared again into darkness. The better class of these extraordinary houses were surrounded with a rough bamboo paling, perfectly covered with large land-snails, which are eaten in great numbers by the poor people. There were heaps of them lying in the sun to dry, and great stacks of them stored away neatly in grass hampers, ready for transmission into the interior. A few old withered Spanish hags were basking in the sun, plaiting straw mats, or otherwise employing themselves, while cats and dogs lay stretched around in a delightful comatose condition. We could not help thinking of the destruction which an earthquake would occasion in establishments such as these, literally hollowed out of the ground, without pole or stay of any

sort, and only a little thatching stuffed in wherever an unevenness in the earth rendered it necessary.

We were not sorry to reach the shelter of our hotel, quite overcome with the burning heat and choking dust. The streets were comparatively deserted, for it is said that none but Englishmen or fools venture out, unless obliged, under the mid-day sun.

The town of Oran being quite "done," as far as we were concerned, we began at once to prepare for speedy departure, and engaged a carriage with three horses to carry us to the town of St. Denis du Sig, the scene of the cotton plantations some thirty miles distant. It was settled that we should start very early in the morning, and make a détour by the model farm of Arbal, reaching St. Denis du Sig the same night, and returning to Oran the following evening.

In pursuance of orders received, therefore, the hotel waiter called us at four o'clock next morning. We rose immediately and dressed, grumbling sorely at the early start. We jumped into our

clothes with great expedition, quite loathing the waiter all the time, and having severely burned our throats with a boiling cup of coffee, tumbled into the clumsy machine prepared for us, and rumbled off once more. It was a horrid, ramshackly vehicle, with broken windows and crazy joints, drawn by such a melancholy trio of horses as made one's heart ache to look at them, though the poor things did try to assume a valour they did not possess, by arching their scraggy necks and tinkling their little bells. We drove through a hideous country, alternately divided into cultivated land and moors not yet reclaimed, skirting on our way the borders of the great salt lake, and about ten o'clock reached the gate of Arbal, the model farm *par excellence* of the province. It is in the possession of a Monsieur St. Maur, and is worked for him by three middle-aged bachelors. The house and office are enclosed within a high sort of fortification—not against Arabs, as I at first imagined, but as a safeguard against the depredations of the jackal and the lynx.

Driving through the gates, we found ourselves in a large double courtyard, with little houses ranged all round, their doors high up in the wall, approached by rough wooden ladders. In the centre was a stone washing-trough, shaded by pleasant willows; and further on, the house of the masters, built in a retired spot, embowered in roses and wild flowers. Dismounting, I accosted a gentleman who seemed like one "having authority," and asked him (as I was generally spokesman on these occasions) if we might be permitted to look over the farm. He was all politeness, albeit a little shy, and offered at once to act as *cicerone*. I must again pay homage to French hospitality—to the universal kindness which we met with throughout our journey—nothing but civility from all with whom we came in contact, and, in some cases, such excessive attention as one would only expect to find in an intimate friend. Wherever we went, we were received with open arms, unprovided, as we were, with letters of introduction, and it was rare indeed that they would let

us go away without joining in the family meal.

The gentleman of whom we have just spoken was No. 2 of the ruling three, and superintendent of the animal department, the other two overlooking respectively the crops and the books. He led us through the yards and outhouses, explaining all the arrangements as we went along; and most admirable arrangements they appeared to be. There is quite a little colony enclosed within the walls—thirty French labourers, with their wives and children; in all, some one hundred and twenty souls. A tidy little white-washed chapel stands by itself in one corner of the yard, where mass is performed every Sunday morning. There is also a brewery, a wine-press, a forge, and a barn capable of storing 3,100 quarters, besides the usual accompaniment of storehouses and outbuildings. The estate covers an area of 6,575 acres, of which about two-fifths are under cultivation. The rest is occupied by mountain and grazing-ground.

The principal produce of the farm lies in grain and wool. The latter fetches seven shillings and

sevenpence a stone in the French markets, a very low figure when you consider that it is gold medal wool. Our friend seized a sheep as it was rushing past him, and made us examine the fleece, very thick and fine, like velvet-pile, and as long in the staple as one's middle finger. They are merino sheep, bred from French fathers out of Arab mothers, a cross which is found to succeed admirably, as the animal grows to a considerable size, and bears a large quantity of wool. They are only permitted to breed once a year, for fear of injuring the mothers, and are never allowed to come in contact with any but the original pure rams. At the time of our visit there were six hundred ewes in stock, independent of the lambs of the year.

Shearing only takes place once a year. We watched the flocks as they were led by their Arab shepherds out of their cool and airy sheds to the grazing-grounds, and anything cleaner and more healthy than they looked it is impossible to imagine. A little further on were some cart-horse

stallions, fine animals, brushed and dressed to perfection. A good working horse is produced by a cross of these European ones with Arab mares, though, as in the case of the sheep, no after-breeding is allowed with half-bred stallions. The pigs which we saw driven out to feed were a mixture of the white English race and those of Spain; the object of the cross being to prevent their becoming too unwieldy to cater for themselves. The cows in use are of the small Brittany kind, which are found to stand heat pretty well, though they are not equal to the ugly Arab cattle as workers for the field. Mules are considered better than either bullocks or horses for field labour, as they not only do a good day's work, but eat any sort of food, and are quite content to sleep anywhere, in the field or in the ditch. At the same time it is impossible to leave anything living outside the enclosure after dark, as the neighbouring Arabs, like the rest of their race, have not very strict notions of *meum* and *tuum*. There are hardly any Arabs on the farm except in the capacity of shepherds.

The ordinary run of work is done by the French residents, with the assistance of a few extra hands at harvest-time—Kabyles and natives of Morocco.

We were now taken out to see the "nakedness of the land," as the farmer expressed it, and the prospect certainly did look bare enough. Instead of grass through which it would be an arduous task to walk—not at all unusual in this territory—we saw nothing but burnt-up earth; and where four or five feet of waving corn should have been glancing in the sun, there was only the remainder of a few earless blades, scorched almost before they had had time to show their heads. This is the worst year they have had here for fifteen years, and counts as blank in their export books. The ground is laid out in vineyards, and in fields for the growth of cereals and mustard. The ruins of an old Roman town, vestiges of which sprout up here and there through the herbage in bits of stone with inscriptions, in pillars and broken statues, tell of the glories that "have been."

Very ingenious adaptations have been made of Roman thermæ and subterranean vaults for the storing of corn and oats, which, once safely packed away, are plastered up, as a protection from the monster ants which inundate all the country. These creatures are the greatest plague from which the colonists suffer in this district—worse considerably than the grasshoppers, that seem but little known out here. The great grievance (besides the inevitable one of lack of land), is want of water. There is but one stream to do all the irrigation of the 6,575 acres, so that when rains fail, as they have done this year, all the crops are destroyed—many, indeed, do not as much as show above the soil. Artesian wells have been attempted, but what water appeared was too salt even for the growth of cotton. "Toujours en excès," said my agricultural friend, should be the motto of Algeria. Either the rains come down in torrents, or they do not come at all. One of the great causes of the outcry for land lies in the immense extent that is neces-

sary for the bringing up of cattle. There is but one crop of grass on a field *per annum*, on account of the great summer heats, so that the entire supply which is needed from May to September has to be cut at one and the same time.

Penetrating through an immense cactus hedge, straggling some fifteen or twenty feet high, we found ourselves in the garden—such a pretty garden, covering an area of seven acres. There were long walks, shaded by mulberries, cut and trained into thick arches of foliage. There were masses of roses of every sort and kind, bushes of the dear old-fashioned Madame Laffay, so pink, and fat, and sweet, and rich clusters of thick-leaved yellow buds twining about the tree-trunks, the deep red Géant de Batailles, and delicately-scented bunches of Provence. The plantations, too, of oranges, lemons, figs, and apricots, were all loaded with coming fruit, not to speak of brilliant pomegranate-flowers and the sober branches of the olive. Oranges are a new introduction in the farm, and already thrive admirably.

We were now called in by the sound of a great bell to what my friend called a "modest repast!" I had endeavoured several times to excuse our party from intruding on his kindness, but he insisted on our appearing at the breakfast-table, and of course we were only too glad to give way. In the cool parlour of the "master's" house we found numbers one and three already waiting, and sat down, a party of six, attended by a tidy body in neat white coif. Oranges peeped in at the window, and brightly-painted birds glittered in their cages under the shade of the verandah. I looked at our cheery hosts, and thought what a jolly life they must lead—so free and comfortable they looked in their rough, ill-fitting clothes, and their bronzed sunburnt faces seemed so healthy. Everything on the table was of home manufacture; white wine and strong home-brewed, excellent bread and butter, with eggs and vegetables. There were also partridges, and such good cheese, probably the production of the old lady herself, who

stood behind, a buxom Hebe, with snowy napkin and clean white plates. While the meal was going on I found leisure to survey the oldest colonist of the group, who first set the farm going. He arrived with his tent twenty-three years since, and pitched it on the sorry field of oats that languished where the house now stands. He was a good-humoured-looking man, with cropped grey hair and a laughing eye. Though a Frenchman, he had never been to Paris, and had only seen Algiers once, now ten years ago! He talked of colonization and its future at some length, only reiterating, however, that which I had so often heard before.

The same complaint arises in Oran as in the other provinces with regard to the imperfect means of communication. This is one of the great stumbling-blocks in the colonist's path, bringing about indirectly the ruin of many of the smaller men. Considerable panic was caused, indeed, within the last year or two, by the failure of so large a number of the settlers. My friend, how-

ever, assured me that they brought it in a great degree on themselves by their recklessness, and that the country was not in their case to blame. With an ardour only equalled by their inexperience, they rushed into ill-conceived schemes of building and ill-imagined enterprises. They felicitated themselves at the outset on the delights of buying at a very low rate, forgetting that when the modest purse, with which they purchased corn and cattle for a song, was exhausted, they would find themselves struggling producers, selling at a very low figure the fruits of a great deal of labour; a state of things rendered all the worse by the exorbitant prices demanded for European goods—wine, and cotton stuffs, and clothing—which triple and quadruple their original value in their progress over the shocking ruts and roads called by courtesy "strategic." It has been well said that "in fine weather you skirt alongside the road, while in wet weather you do not pass at all!"

The wise and prudent among the colonists meet with well-merited success. It was proved before the Council of Agriculture that the European system of farming, in contradistinction to the Arab, clears, when properly carried out, a profit of £3 15*s.* per acre every three years out of four; and that the greatest losses sustained have been among the cattle, the result of heat and unaccustomed nourishment. Land averages from thirty-five to sixty shillings the acre, but water forms a most important item of expenditure in its cultivation. The repressive character of Government surveillance, in the management of the colonists, shows itself in the misrule of the Agricultural Councils, which, in the conduct of their administration, imitate those from whom they derive their authority, and end by paralyzing the efforts of the colonists, as the decrees of the Aulic Council paralyzed the Austrian arms long ago. Administering from a distance, as the Aulic Council did, they, like them, make very great mistakes. Everywhere, but more especially in still struggling

Algeria, unity of views, promptitude and decision in action, and an attentive study of facts, are amongst the primary conditions of agricultural success."

In all discussions on this subject, the old complaint of want of land is sure to crop out sooner or later. The same cry is repeated year after year, "Ce ne sont pas les bras qui manquent à la terre, c'est la terre qui manque à la colonization;" and the discouragement thence arising is the real cause of the annual reflux of would-be colonists back to their native land. Capital and space are the indispensable requisites. The settlers do not ask the former of the State, which has too long forgotten its real *rôle*—in this case, that of making roads. Private interest is quite willing and prepared to furnish capital, on condition of receiving land in payment, according to a suitable scale. Would it be so very difficult for the State, in these circumstances, to provide more land, considering the thinness of the population and its extreme importance to the vital interests of

the country? It is inevitable that the Arabs shall eventually give place to the Europeans, as the Indians have already done in America. In the plains of the Sig, already all the inhabitants are either French or Spanish, with a slight sprinkling only of natives. Government seems to imagine that the ceding of land is equivalent to the gift of a fortune. Though ruin succeeds ruin, they fail to see that the man to whom a concession is made risks that which he possesses, with only a possibility of success. Land is difficult of management, dangerous often, and sometimes suicidal. Because in France it holds an intrinsic value, it is supposed that the colonists of North Africa, who receive the ground for "next to nothing," must necessarily be wealthy; although in France itself the reclaiming of land has been the ruin of many, for its only real value consists in the money and labour expended by its owner.

The wages of farm-servants is another subject which is occupying much the papers and journals of Algeria. They are naturally high, because

there is a want of constant occupation for field labourers. The men are called in at harvest-time in large numbers, and packed off when the season is over. Men cannot live on nothing, and must make the work of the few months pay for the forced idleness of the remainder. It is the duty of a large proprietor, in distant lands such as this, to find occupation during the entire year for the servants who are necessary to him. Can farmers expect to find around them in colonies beyond the seas an indefinite number of hands to be taken up or dropped at pleasure? Are they not constrained so to combine their systems of culture, as to find constant labour for their men, without overstepping their accustomed limits? Whether is it better to make them gain their bread by means of a plan which furnishes successive work throughout the year, or to employ them for six months and pay them for twelve? On the farm of Arbal the first system has been pursued. Wages never rise above two francs a-day without food, and thirty francs a month with food. The

men are happy and contented, and never wish to change masters.

In the course of one year (1864) no fewer than 22,000 men returned to France, cursing Africa, because there was no satisfactory work to be found. Seventy extra hands (chiefly natives of Morocco) were working on the Arbal harvest, and European work-people were returning home, finding no work to do which was suitable. They found it more to their advantage to return from whence they came, than to run the risks of "accidental" employment. Arab labour is very little used in the province, as it is proved to be so execrably bad. One field at Arbal produced in a season fifteen hectolitres of wheat; a neighbouring field of exactly the same dimensions, belonging to an Arab chief, produced only six hectolitres! 1862 was a great year for cereal crops. Some Arabs in the neighbourhood filled their accustomed garners, and then gave themselves up to singing and dancing, leaving the rest of the crop to rot on the ground, because it was over and above their usual

harvest! M. St. Maur never willingly employs Europeans as extra harvest hands, on the principle of not encouraging vagrant settlers, as he considers them so prejudicial to the true interests of colonization. Therefore, as there is no more land to be obtained at present for love or money, he concludes that colonization is at a stand-still—a ruinous state of things for a half-grown country, and only to be remedied by a thorough change in the system of misrule at present going on.

Letters are written to the papers by certain malcontents, complaining of having to pay workmen two francs, fifty centimes, per day; whilst in France, their mother-country, the same sum is the usual average for railway labour. These colonists complain of paying their reapers two or three francs; while in the circle of Paris six, or even seven francs is the accustomed wage. In Provence and the valley of the Rhône, three francs per diem is the sum commonly recognised as due to a cutter of the corn.

But the real road to agricultural prosperity in Algeria lies not in the reduction of salaries, but in the amelioration of the crop. Supposing a field of oats to have cost two hundred francs in working, and to have produced but ten hectolitres, the sum of the hectolitre will be twenty francs, whereas it would only have been ten francs, had the field been capable of producing twenty hectolitres. The Americans have shown, on the subject of cotton, at how cheap a rate a crop may be obtained—firstly, by pushing the cultivation of the produce to perfection; secondly, by applying to the crop liberally, but with intelligence, all the money which may be necessary to force it to the very acme of production. Thus they are enabled to sell with profit at a price unattainable to competition in this French colony, although the expenses of freight and carriage are many times greater than in a country such as this, which borders on the hem, so to speak, of the European markets.

At the gates of the farm we got into our car-

riage, and bade a cordial farewell to those who had entertained us so kindly. Our road now lay across the plains, by the margin of the lake, into the neighbouring district of the Sig, said by some to be the most suitable spot in all Algeria for the cultivation of cotton. We concluded, however, after a visit to the principal plantation, that its only telling advantages over the Sahara was its nearness to a large seaport. This advantage would be nullified by railway, if the plains of El-Outaia in the desert were to be opened out by colonial enterprise.

Shortly before sunset, we came in sight of the village—a village to dream of in its pastoral simplicity. It lies in the midst of a fertile plain, half buried in fresh trees and waving corn—"'mid bowery hollows crowned with summer sea." A cluster of clean white houses nestles under a hill, with a guardian church-tower rising in the midst, surrounded by hedges and clumps of the glistening-leaved pomegranate, heavy with a burden of blood-red blossom. It consists of little more

than one street, with a shady avenue that runs its entire length. A nice little inn stands in the centre of the village, clean and comfortable, with adjuncts of verandah and primitive wooden balconies, whilst picturesque houses lie scattered on either side, adorned with vine-trellised porches.

In such a place as this must have dwelt Hermann and Dorothea, dreaming away their peaceful lives, listening under the shelter of arching foliage to the discourses of their venerable curé, recking little of the busy hum of the world without. Great carts rolled slowly by us, drawn by teams of jingling horses, while peasants hung about in the short twilight of the south, discussing over their pipes the little events of the past day. Soon a tolling bell summoned them all to prayer, and they walked quietly off in groups of twos and threes, to render thanks to God before retiring to rest. It was like a scene in another country. Nearly the whole of the tiny colony is composed of Spaniards, and, seeing them strolling about in the national velvet hats and tight-fitting,

dark clothes, one could hardly believe that this was still Africa. Suddenly the bell pealed out once more, and the throng dispersed to their separate homes. Ere long the moon streamed down on the silent village, while long still shadows lay across the road, and the grasshopper chaunted alone in the peaceful night.

We were up betimes the following morning, and went off at once to visit the cotton plantations. The Usine d'Egrainage is the largest establishment of the kind in the neighbourhood, and all that is best of the "Sig" cotton, celebrated in African produce, is drawn from the works of this single proprietor. He has two farms, which occupy together an area of ninety-five acres, devoted exclusively to the cultivation of cotton. He was not so civil as other farmers that we had met with, turning us over to the tender mercies of a man who knew nothing of the subject. This person contented himself with showing us the flower-garden, and pointing out a monster lizard, and other things, very interesting

in their way, which we had not come all this distance to see. While we were wandering about the premises, however, we came upon the head of the machinery department, and he satisfied our thirst for knowledge as far as his lights enabled him to do.

Cotton-bushes are here ranged in rows, as in the plantation of M. Dufourg of El-Outaia, leaving a square yard between every two plants. According to this system the same land is used during a series of years by merely placing the shrubs a few inches to the right or left of a former spot, because they are furnished with but one long straight root, which penetrates deep, without spreading, and thus exhausting the ground. The original seed is Georgian long staple; that gathered on the premises, however, is found to answer very well for the production of new plants, with an intermixture of American grain every five or six years. One harvest is the utmost that can be obtained in the year, owing, I imagine, to the scarcity of water.

Sowing commences in May, and gathering in September. At that period a number of extra hands are called in, and the total number of labourers then averages from two to three hundred, according to the success or failure of the crop. Each receives from two and a half to four francs a day. We examined the cleaning machines, the work of Platt, which are fourteen in number, and turn out from 600 to 1,300 bales of 219 lbs. each per annum. These are taken in carts to Oran, a distance of about twenty-five miles, and immediately shipped off to Havre for sale. The proprietor also does a considerable business in the way of buying up the uncleaned produce of the neighbouring small farmers, who possess no cleaning-machines, paying them sevenpence the pound. The same article fetches tenpence farthing the pound, as turned out by the above-mentioned gentleman.

In the course of some little conversation which we had with him before our departure, he expressed great surprise at our not having seen

the "Barrage," or great reservoir, said to be the largest in Algeria. Anxious to remedy with all despatch so flagrant an omission, we toiled off under a blazing sun, along the way that he pointed out, between great hedges of pomegranates that bordered the dazzlingly dusty roads.

The reservoir is formed in a gorge among the mountains, at a short distance from the village, by means of a great wall or embankment of stones and mortar. It is, in fact, an artificial lake, from which is drawn the water necessary to irrigate the surrounding country. The plain of Sig covers an area of 24,000 acres, and about a tenth part of it is annually watered from this "barrage," at an average rate of five francs the irrigable hectare, or two francs the acre. The reservoir contains about four million metres cube of water, from which must be deducted 400,000 metres of slime and mud. The height of the embankment is 50 feet, by 117 yards long, and 17 feet wide. When the reservoir is full the water reaches the entire height of the wall, but

this is a very rare occurrence. Aqueducts arranged in the thickness of the masonry permit of the reservoir being emptied in the course of a few hours, by means of valves and apertures constructed for the purpose.

The President of the General Council of Agriculture at Oran stated, in his report of 1863, that on this side the Mediterranean the less land receives water direct from heaven, the more fit it seems to be for production, if watered artificially. Water and civilization march hand in hand over the soil, for it has come to be an axiom that drought is the curse of the country, the great stumbling-block in the way of agricultural improvement. In this case it will be the reservoirs, about which so much agitation is now going on in the colony, that will change the face of Algeria. They will serve a double purpose too. By collecting the winter rains within manageable compass, they will revivify the earth, and at the same time tend to the drainage of the marshes, which at present sow sickness and death

throughout the province; while the low lands, freed from miasmas, will open out a new field for agricultural energy and labour.

The total expense of making the necessary reservoirs in Oran will amount to upwards of three million francs; and these the settlers propose that the State should advance, promising in their turn to keep in perpetual repair the tanks and canals connected with them. They offer also to pay to Government from twenty to thirty francs for every acre watered in summer, and from two to ten francs for every acre watered in winter, according to a tariff to be drawn up for different districts. The entire sum was calculated to be about 200,000 francs per annum. Water is of such vital importance to the colonists that they are willing to make any sacrifices in order to obtain it. There is a territory in the plains of the Habra which lets for £5 an acre, because there is a stream running through it; while at Thelat, only ten miles from Oran, there exists a property of 900 acres, with considerable buildings, and

very rich soil, for which the other day a price of £1 an acre could barely be obtained. In the valley of the Mina water is very scarce, merely from want of means to keep possession of it, for in the winter torrents come down from the mountains and rush into the sea, to the extent (last year) of 500 million cubic metres!* The tax, after all, is not high, if we come to compare it with that of other countries. In the department of the Loire, for instance, where, too, winter snows fall abundantly, there is a water tax of sixteen francs; while in Italy and Spain, more especially at Llorca, in the kingdom of Murcia, it rises as high as forty and even fifty francs. What will be the result of the negotiations now pending it is impossible to say. Meanwhile many local Agri-

* I feel compelled to quote my authority for so startling a statement, and refer the reader to the reports of the General Council of African Agriculture for the current year: also to the "Discussion au sujet des barrages-reservoirs dans la province d'Oran," publiée à Oran par le Conseil Général. Page 25. Also to a speech addressed by M. St. Maur to the local society, and reprinted in the *Courrier d'Oran*, date March 2nd, 1867.

cultural Societies are erecting temporary reservoirs at their own expense.

The Arabs refuse point-blank to pay any tax at all for water, unless absolutely forced to do so, on the principle of "what has been is good." They complain, moreover, of being heavily weighted as it is, although they are much better off, on the whole, than their European rivals. They calculate land by "ploughs," and each plough is supposed to work five-and-twenty acres. Their expenses are reckoned by themselves at three hundred francs per plough, besides one hundred francs for the Achour tax, and, if they cultivate according to new-fangled notions, a few more francs per acre besides. They argue, therefore, that with a water-tax added to their other expenses, the production of a plough's worth of crop will cost them eight hundred francs, and accordingly wash their hands of the projected plans, as they do of everything else which involves progress and improvement.

Returned to Oran, we were met by stifling

clouds of dust; and, quite disgusted with the town and its accompaniments, proceeded at once to engage the coupé for the night journey to Tlemcen.

Night journeys in a diligence are, after all, not so terrible as they at first sight appear. The carriage rattles along cheerily enough, throwing great sheets of light across the road, while the mind finds much food for pleasant wanderings in the indistinct masses that appear out of seeming chaos and the half-formed shapes of rocks and precipices.

On the present occasion, however, we found ourselves more than usually uncomfortable, in consequence of the upright back of the conveyance and its ill-stuffed cushions, and were more than half-choked with dust until we got some little distance out of Oran—a town of which dust seems to be a staple commodity, swirling round the corners into the eyes of passers-by in every kind of weather. It was five o'clock, P.M., when we jingled out of the Porte Napoléon

into the open country—bleak moors, rocky and tangled with dwarf-palms, undulating down to the water's edge, that of the eternal salt-lake. It is impossible to make any expedition out of Oran without skirting that dreary lagoon, which on this occasion looked spectrally sad, as seen in the gathering obscurity. Darkness came on rapidly, and we endeavoured to make ourselves as comfortable for the night as was compatible with such very close quarters. Little by little the landscape merged into formless haze, and we were left to the contemplation of lamp-lit horse-tails, or to the indulgence of our own thoughts, a monotony broken now and then when we clattered through some sleeping village, the houses of which seemed to fly past us like disturbed white ghosts in the gloom, before we halted for a change of team. All these pauses were unnecessarily long, for on every available occasion the majority of the passengers tumbled out to "take a gill," hob-nobbing with each other all round, and then inviting the guard to take a glass as an excuse for an extra drain. At last we

settled into a disturbed sleep, interrupted by jolts and jerks, and rendered horrible by nightmare, until, as day was beginning to dawn, we were rudely wakened up, and desired to get out and walk, to ease the horses.

Now, the hour before daylight is always a trying time, and under such circumstances as these, became doubly depressing. Our fellow-voyagers, however, had all turned out with dirty faces and dishevelled hair, most unbecoming in the morning light. Nothing was left but for us to do likewise. We turned out, therefore, grumbling at the cold, and trudged shivering over the stones, big with a real grievance. It was eight o'clock before Tlemcen came in sight, and fully nine before we were landed, hungry and weary, at the door of the Hôtel de France (an excellent hotel), after a miserable night travel of sixteen hours.

Tlemcen is a pretty town, of upwards of 19,000 inhabitants, of whom three thousand are European. It was first occupied by the French in

1842, and was taken and retaken in the days of Abd-el-Kader, on account of its important position as frontier fortress on the boundaries of Morocco. This high political and military position is exceedingly favourable to its industrial and commercial interests, rendering it the principal central depôt for merchandise in this portion of the Tell. Oil is the chief source of revenue to the district, while corn, vegetables, and fruit—almonds, peaches, figs, and cherries—daily find their way into the great market-place. It is full of monuments—relics of bygone Saracenic splendour.

The town existed, in the days of the Romans, under the names of Pomaria and Agadir, and became the capital of a province after the Arab irruption. Moussa the Second made it his capital in 1355, A.D.; the metropolis of a kingdom which stretched from Morocco to Algiers, and this period may be taken as the culminating epoch of its prosperity. According to ancient historians, it then had a population of more than 125,000 souls, and was decorated with numerous palaces

and public monuments. Its king was a man of refined mind, a patron of the arts and sciences, who aimed at making it what Florence afterwards became under the fostering care of Lorenzo de' Medici. He had commercial relations with all the important maritime towns of the Mediterranean, was surrounded by a brilliant court, and commanded a vast and well-disciplined army of weather-beaten warriors. Tlemcen, in a word, was at this time, when the genius of the European nations was just beginning to wake from a long sleep, one of the most important, as well as one of the most civilized of the great cities of the world.

With the opening years of the sixteenth century, the decadence of Tlemcen commenced. Civil war had raised up another king, who had built another city (Mansourah), almost within a stone's throw of the original town. Weakened thus by intestinal broil, it is not surprising that she should have fallen an easy prey to the victorious Spaniard. In 1509 she became the humble vassal of the Castilian lion, and from that day

the page of her history is steeped in blood. The brothers Barbarossa preluded their career of conquest by the division of the kingdom of Tlemcen, one of them raising Algiers into an opposition capital; and later on, we see the Pacha of Algiers bearding the Emir of Tlemcen under his very walls. The son of the last Sultan fled to Oran, in 1553, before the Turkish army, and sought protection and an asylum there at the hands of Spain. He was baptized under the name of Don Carlos, and passed his life in obscurity at the court of Philip the Second. Tlemcen sunk lower and lower under Turkish rule, and languished into a third-rate country town, until, at the period of the French invasion, she received a new impulse, and retrieved, by means of her waters and fertile soil, a little of her former importance.

Abd-el-Kader was particularly fond of the place, comparing it to a friend whose affection he had gained. "At sight of me," sang the Emir poet, with oriental grandiloquence, "Tlemcen gave me her hand to kiss. I raised the veil that shrouded

her lovely face, and my heart beat loud with happiness. Tlemcen had many masters, but she blushed before them like a living coal, lowering her long lashes, and turning away her head in indifference; for me alone she had a smile, and rendered me the very happiest of Sultans by murmuring, 'Embrace me, my love, and close my lips with thine.'"

After we had breakfasted, and arrayed ourselves in clean garments, we hastened to secure a carriage—a lumbering 'bus, the only vehicle to be had in the town—and mounting its roof, set off in high delight at the lovely weather, to see everything that was to be seen. Our driver was not too intelligent, being evidently unaccustomed to doing the honours of his native place, but was, at any rate, less futile than his wife, who listened blankly to our inquiries about the sights, her face only lighting up with intelligence when she suggested the "tir au pistolet!"

Driving through the fortifications, we penetrated into the open, passing great masses of

Roman and Moorish remains, until we arrived at Mansourah, whose lofty minaret is a conspicuous object for miles around. The sole remnants of the ancient city, born, as it was, of war and bloodshed, are portions of the outer walls and the ruins of the great Mosque; at sight of which we unanimously agreed that this was the best thing of the sort which we had come upon in the course of our wanderings.

The effect of the scene from where we stood, on a heap of tumbled masonry, was most striking: a regular line of crumbling walls, covering an area of 250 acres, the warm red of which contrasted with the soft green of the springing barley. From amid clumps of olive, fig, and ilex rose here a ruined tower, and there a shattered arch. Beyond were the plains of the Isser, and hills that undulated away into the distance, until they seemed to mingle with the sky. To our right were the remains of the mosque, with its thirteen doors, and all that is left of its once lovely minaret, a brick-built shaft, some 120 feet high, adorned

with the graceful tracery of Moorish art, a finely dentelated horse-shoe archway and delicate clerestory, supported on alabaster columns. All the work in this neighbourhood dates from the era of the Alhambra and Seville Alcazar, a period the architecture of which was more beautiful than grand; and this tower may be set down as one of its finest examples. There are still remnants, among the ornaments on the higher part, of enamel and coloured tiles; while the ground for yards around is encumbered with brilliant *débris* of green and red mosaic worked into quaint patterns, and with fragments of translucid alabaster. The tower is crumbling day by day, and it is probable that this magnificent relic will shortly disappear altogether, for two only of its walls are now standing—fair marks for the violent winds that sweep across the open from the sea. From among the fretted stones and carved work were springing flowers innumerable, of a lovely blue, and red, and yellow, the convolvulus and rose, the gentian and wild datura, its long tendrils trailing over

the rubbish, as though to teach a lesson of humility, by contrasting the smallest works of God with the rarest and most perfect productions of human skill.

Our driver now retraced his steps, winding through the queer streets of the town, nearly upsetting some closely-veiled female in a sharp turn round a corner, or making a cut at some over-bold child, in spangled dress and pointed red velvet cap, who had perhaps dropped its gold-worked slipper on the road, and chose of course the most dangerous moment, as children invariably do, to dart among the horses' legs and reclaim the treasure. We passed out of the other door, at the opposite side of Tlemcen, driving over a road that jerked us unmercifully among the ruts, and made our way through a great burial-ground, crowded with memorials of the dead, a dome-shaped tomb of some venerated Marabout rising here and there among the trees. We came at last to a sudden halt at the entrance of a wooded lane. Here we were handed

over to the tender mercies of an Arab guide, who tucked up his burnous and marched a-head to do the honours of Sidi-Bou-Medin. He conducted us up the hill on which the village stands, through glades of sheltered vegetation and between beautiful hedgerows. A tangle of young vine-leaves, or an overarching acacia, showered from time to time its silver wealth upon the ground; and occasionally we had a glimpse of clear spring water, into which dipped the branches of the pomegranate with their gorgeous blossom. The village is built in straggling streets over the hill, houses rising in succession one above another—Moorish and flat-roofed; most of them with tiny windows and low-browed doors, shaded by vine-trellised porches. Figures lay about the steps, enveloped in white robes, as we approached the great mosque, seeking shelter from the sun, and smoking the pipe of peace. Following close upon the heels of our guide, we entered its mighty portals, iron-clamped and brass-clasped, and found ourselves

in a richly-paved courtyard, open to the sky. Marbles and alabasters formed the floor, which was chequered with shadow and light thrown through the roof of vine, festoons of fruit and leafage mellowing the too garish sunbeams. Through distant vistas, formed by arching branches, we beheld groups of praying figures, kneeling in silent meditation, or bowing their foreheads to the earth. A turbaned gentleman now made his appearance, and conducted us down to a vault-like chapel, standing in a little private court of its own, with an antique marble well and silver-clasped bucket. This court also is rich in mosaic and carved work, supported on alabaster arches, adorned with illuminated verses of the Koran. From the well that stands in the midst, the Faithful from all quarters come and drink, as the waters are said to possess great healing qualities. Detaching a silver key from his girdle, our guide opened an elaborately ornamented door, and led us into the tomb of Sidi-Bou-Medin, the saint who has given his name to the locality.

He was a Moor of noble birth, residing at Seville, in 1126, and was destined from early youth for the profession of arms. Devoted, however, to the pursuit of science, he left his home, and having wandered through the universities of Spain, came over to Africa, and found himself at Tlemcen. Struck with the great beauty of the spot, he resolved to settle in the neighbourhood; but the noise and bustle of the city so disturbed his thoughts, that he retired to the mountains, and built himself a hermitage. The fame of his piety and wisdom soon spread far and wide, and he saw himself compelled, in order to maintain his dignity, to work a variety of miracles.

A thaleb one day had a quarrel with his wife, and resolved on separation. Before taking so important a step, however, he thought it wise to ask the opinion of the learned anchorite. As he entered the cell, the voice of the recluse sounded out of the darkness, repeating verses of the Koran.

"Keep thy wife and fear God," he cried, quoting from the thirty-third division of the seventh chapter. The thaleb was thunder-struck.

"How knew you the object of my visit," he ventured to inquire, "considering that I had confided my secret to no one?"

"My son," replied Bou-Medin, "as you stepped across the threshold, I saw the words written in burning characters on your burnous, and thus divined your intentions."

The holy man returned to Spain, and dwelt there, great in reverence and honours, until he was sent for thence by the Sultan of Tlemcen, who found himself in need of his advice. Although in the 77th year of his age, he undertook the journey, and on sight of Tlemcen's towers, he cried in the spirit of inspiration,

"How propitious a spot is this to slumber at peace in eternal rest!"

Arrived close to the gates, he sat down, amid the whirring clamour of passing traffic, and

died, murmuring quietly, "God is the supreme truth." His corpse was conveyed reverently to the spot where it now reposes, and the mosque and village rose over his remains.

The tomb consists of a narrow little low room, the walls of which are so covered with carved and painted wood, and with magnificent embroideries, that nothing of them is visible. As soon as our eyes became accustomed to the obscurity, we perceived two catafalques, on which repose the coffins of the sage and of his favourite pupil, both of them wrapped in costly silks, and palled with gorgeously embroidered draperies of gold and silver. Around the walls are hung ostrich-eggs set in gold, and a multitude of banners—silk and satin brocade—the gifts of pious chiefs and emirs. The dim religious light is admitted through painted glass, which gives an aspect of mystery to the interior of the sacred edifice. It was interesting to look about in this venerated sepulchre and muse on its time-honoured dust, which has remained untouched through ages—silent, still, and

undesecrated through seven long centuries of war and tumult—more than half a thousand years of the hopes and envies of vanished kings, of tottering thrones, and of crumbling dynasties!

Much impressed, we mounted slowly up the steps that led into the mosque, between rows of little dark chapels, wherein rest the bones of those chosen for the sage's bodyguard on the day of resurrection, and then through another spacious and lofty court, with plashing fountains, into the mosque itself. A fine building it is, of the best period of Moorish art, with arches resting, as usual, on columns of alabaster or Algerian onyx, and walls and roofs carved and fretted with holy arabesques, the whole picked out in red and white, chocolate and pale blue, interlaced and intermingled like the patterns seen in the kaleidoscope.

We strolled about in true tourist fashion, staring into the air, tumbling in the obscurity over the kneeling figures, and tripping ourselves up in the sumptuous carpets. We thus wandered on through horseshoe arches, and up

flights of steps, into an enclosure where the schoolmaster was sitting with his class, administering the justice of the cane.

It was a funny sight. A shady building with cracked plaster walls, very high and domed. A great doorway opened into a neglected court, where rose the fig from between the broken stones, while frogs and lizards leapt in and out of the central fountain in the sunlight. In the corner of the darkened room sat the pedagogue cross-legged, wrapped in a brown burnous, the hood of which nearly concealed his face; while close in front of him squatted a hapless imp, gabbling over his lessons, on whose devoted head the cane came down with the regularity of clockwork. In an outer circle crouched the rest of the class, all hooded and haiked, each with his scroll supported on his crossed legs, and all shouting out at once. The noise of their shrill voices, indeed, was deafening, each pupil attempting to gain the master's approbation by outshrieking his fellows. There was one little boy half buried among

folds of blue and white woollen drapery, who might have served as a model for Wilkie or William Hunt. He swayed his little body with great energy, while his large eyes seemed starting out of his head in his endeavours to do battle with the difficulties before him, and his lips moved rapidly up and down as he conned the words and shouted them out at the top of his voice.

We left this scene of "childhood's joys" (who would be a child again?), and penetrated up to the top of the hill, scrambling in and out of courts and rocky staircases, through dwellings, and over flat low roofs. Arrived at the top, we obtained a really very fine view of the plains of the Isser, and sat down to enjoy its beauty. Below us spread a soft dark wood of olives, with here and there a white-domed Marabout, and then a vast expanse of fresh green fields, dotted with a multitude of little villages, and extending into the pale blue hills beyond. Scattered at intervals over the plain, rose square Saracenic minarets, in solitary grace. Heavy clouds threw great deep purple shadows,

lengthening and vanishing, which, as if in sport, chased each other. To the left, on its eminence, stood Tlemcen, picturesque in appearance, and crowned with many towers; and beyond it, in the extreme distance, the rampart of Mansourah, with its sentinel campanile frowning black against the sky. Vineyards and olive-yards were sprinkled here and there, while many a little brawling rivulet meandered through the trees, glancing like a silver thread amid the verdure. It was a scene from which one retires better of heart, with a sigh of gratitude for the infinite goodness of the Almighty—a scene which spoke for itself of peace and prosperity, singing its own sweet hymn of praise to the beneficent Maker in the glory of His works.

We drove back through the principal streets, under the walls of the gaunt Mechouar, or palace of the Sultans, which through a veil of roses looked down, grim and windowless, upon a busy scene. The band was playing, and everyone of aristocratic pretentions in the town was parading in his best

clothes. There were French soldiers and officers walking about with their wives. A lady or two, in ultra Paris fashions, looked far more odd in our eyes than the Orientals threading in and out among them. Jewesses, in groups, were wrapped in mantles of Pompeiian red, with wide gold border, which is peculiar to them. Jews, their husbands, cool and comfortable-looking, were dressed in white—full linen breeches and embroidered satin jackets, with wonderful gold turbans rolled loosely round the red tarbouche. Children, too, were playing in dozens—bright little figures, clad generally in some very brilliant stuff, yellow, scarlet, or emerald green, with pointed red velvet caps, gold or silver anklets, and festoons of gold sequins strung about their necks. Beautiful things were these children, with their bright complexions and deep auburn hair cut straight across the brow, Sir Joshua fashion. Great as was the variety of colour in the dresses, all was in excellent harmony, as, by the way,

is the case with every variety of Oriental costume.

Before leaving Tlemcen, and taking the diligence back to Oran (whence I was to start by ship for Marseilles), I sallied forth for a solitary walk, to bid a last farewell to North Africa, for this was the last I was destined to see of its picturesque scenery and luxuriant vegetation. Through the queer labyrinths of the Jews' quarter I directed my steps, past the square minarets, each of which is surmounted by its rough stork's nest, with generally a great pair of birds meditating; under the walls of the big mosque of El-Kebir, where there is a charming street, all arched at distances with the Saracenic horse-shoe, and decorated with tiles and legends taken from the Koran. Door-posts, lintels, and wooden shutters, are all elaborately carved, while the window-sills are loaded with pots containing rare flowers, and with cages of parrots and canaries. The houses are very small and curiously constructed, each having *two* distinct courts, one

above the other, with the usual accompaniment of well and pulley. There were women drying clothes on the flat house-tops, or spreading out cotton to bleach, their anklets and massive gold chains making a clanking noise, that reminded one of a prison as they moved about.

Pretty well accustomed by this time to the peculiarities of Eastern towns, I went straight on, although each turn seemed to be the last, passing under vaulted ways that forced me to bend low, and up and down steps that seemed only to lead to "no thoroughfare." At last I emerged into a tumble-down square, where much traffic was going on. Tents and booths encumbered the way, cottons and stuffs filled up the footpath, and crockery of the queerest antique patterns was "going, going, going" for next to nothing. Children howled, women called to each other in shrill, discordant voices, and a band of negro musicians soon added their noise to the deafening hubbub, wagging their heads wildly while they beat their tomtoms and rattled their

castanets, and digging their elbows into the ribs, or coming down on the toes of anyone who might chance to be jostled up against them. A few mules, with widely-spreading burdens, forced themselves through the crowd, and an equestrian or two galloped in and out, regardless of impeding obstacles. The inhabitants of the surrounding houses took no sort of notice of the dreadful *vacarme*, but worked steadily at their primitive looms, or sipped coffee underneath their awnings, as though all were quiet and tranquillity. I forced my way through the bawling throng, and was not sorry to find myself at last in the open country. A perfect land of promise it is, this lovely plain, affording a good example of the capacities of the soil where water abounds, even when unaided by the science of the European agriculturist. I looked my last on this display of the gifts of bounteous nature, sauntering at one time among hedge-rows of matted leaves and blossoms, where the insects hummed and glittered in the light, and great emerald lizards

basked in the mid-day heat; at another pausing in a fresh green meadow, to watch a stately stork that tripped daintily over the flowers; and then pushing my way through a self-formed palisade into a neighbouring field. The corn swayed and rustled in the breeze, while the tender foliage of the vine mingled with that of the grey olive, forming shady bowers, where one could dream pleasantly. Between the boughs were vistas of far-off landscape, peeps of blue hills and clustering villages, while every now and then came wafts of the perfume of roses borne on the summer wind. The beetle boomed and the bird sang, and labourers in the fields carolled out their wild Arab music, answered like an echo by companions at some distance from them. How happy this land should be, with all God's choicest blessings showered into its lap, and yet it is the scene of ceaseless brawl and struggle. That very day, while I lay dreaming and musing in the grass, a bloody fight was going on not many miles away, and the misguided victims of

war were welling out their heart's blood into the thirsty earth, and in their deadly struggle crushing the fruits that should have nourished them. So close, indeed, was the spot where the tribes were contending, that the sound of their guns was distinctly audible in the town. None of the townspeople, however, took any notice. "It was such a common occurrence," they said! Is it wrong to wish that such a degenerate population of miserable cut-throats may soon die out, and leave the country to those better able to avail themselves of its resources? "If the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."

* * * * * * *

"Opposite Marseilles lies a kingdom which must be assimilated to France." Such were the words of the Emperor on the occasion of his visit to Algeria, and they are engraved on the heart of every colonist. The army now governs

supreme, and in the opinion of many this is the great cause of maladministration in the colony.

The majority among the natives are disposed by nature, as well as by interest, to accept French dominion, because they find under its shadow those conditions of order, peace, and justice without which existence is always precarious. So long as the natives continue to exist they must be taught to live quietly in communion with the settlers. At the same time it is to be expected that in a hundred and fifty years or so they—the Arabs proper, at least—will be numbered with the men and things of the past. There they are at present, however, and the system of legislation by which they are ruled proves itself daily to be false in principle, leading only to misgovernment and confusion. Above the masses there is an avaricious minority, that of the bad and worse than useless aristocracy, which has always lived like a leech upon the people, and is opposed to French dominion, because it desires to live in the future as in the past, at the expense of the in-

ferior classes. Unfortunately too much power has been left in the hands of this aristocracy, who have misused it for the attainment of their ends, against the interests both of native and colonist, taking advantage of their superior knowledge to mislead the ignorant as to the intentions of Government. French dominion is therefore precarious, even under favourable circumstances, until the country shall be governed and administered in such a way as to attach the masses to its side, and annihilate the evil influence of the minority. In all their dealings with the inhabitants their conquerors have laid down as an axiom perfect equality before the law, proclaiming loudly at the same time that French authority protects right against injustice, and rewards liberally true and faithful service. Many are the cases, notwithstanding, where the feeble have given way before the strong, and reclamations made by humble individuals have fallen to the ground under high pressure from the aristocratic few. Matters, indeed, are getting

worse, for it is now recognized as a *point de départ* that aristocratic supremacy must be maintained, lest the chiefs should work on the blind slavishness of the tribes, and rouse them against the powers that be: and this want of good faith is not without serious effects on the minds of the uneducated classes. Naturally suspicious, they lose belief in their masters, but are, nevertheless, only too ready to imitate them in their double dealing. Thus while they kiss their hands with fervour, they are perfectly prepared at the same time to rise at any moment even against those who are only seeking to compass their emancipation.

For the last ten years individual property has been promised to the natives, instead of the tribe system, which leaves the poor at the mercy of the rich. The news of this benefit was received with acclamation by those among them not already too degraded to realize its value; but the promise has never been fulfilled, in spite of the *soi-disant* desire of the Govern-

ment to raise the Arabs from their social and political abasement. The institution of private property is, in the opinion of those most competent to form a judgment, the most efficacious means of assuring present dominion, and of simplifying administration; and yet a rumour is now current that the collective system of the tribes will be permitted to continue its career, with only such an establishment of individual property as shall not clash with aristocratic interest. The reason of this policy is to prevent small proprietors from selling their lands to the colonists, because, forsooth, the Arab chiefs are afraid that their power may thus slip from them! But why this oblivion of the interests of colonization? I have shown elsewhere that, without it, French dominion would be *nil* in Algeria—a fact well known to those among the native leaders who still hope to regain their independence.

The Army, whether it governs or whether it administers, whether in barracks or on an

expedition, costs much, and pays nothing. The more numerous the generals, and the greater the number of the men, the more heavy the expense. Not one of their movements but finds a place in cyphers on the budget. Sooner or later, say the natives, France will weary of sterile sacrifice and useless self-abnegation, and ultimately abandon the country.

Colonization, on the other hand, whether it cultivates, fabricates, or engages in commerce, costs next to nothing; the more it spreads, the more it increases the revenues of the State. Not one of its enterprises, durable or evanescent, but sends something, directly or indirectly, into the treasury. It already covers many of the expenses of administration and of public works. A little more progress, and it will produce large returns. Colonization then cannot be attacked from the financial side of the Algerian question.

The Army possesses great powers, and is a cause of terror to evil-doers; but accommodations

may be brought about with it, for it is only led on by a sentiment of duty. A small contribution towards the expenses of war, and there is an end of the matter.

Colonization, although unarmed, is capable of protecting its household gods; and more than this, having parried the danger of the moment, it thinks of the danger of the morrow. Colonists, too, know those who attack them, can point them out and hand them over to justice. Their own interests forbid a thought of pardon, and thus the colonist is a more redoubtable enemy in the end than the soldier.

The troops, an expedition over, return quietly into quarters, without caring whether the last punishment inflicted will prevent further insurrections or not. The colonists, on the contrary, are obliged to think of the future, and of efficacious measures for the preservation of public security. From this results the different attitudes of the soldier and the colonist on questions pending concerning the well-being of Algeria;

and thus we have an illustration of the great danger of leaving the reins of Government in military hands. With the colonists, the denunciation of any danger threatening the colony is not merely an act of opposition, but an expression of their duty to their wives and children. For them absolute and complete dominion over the Arabs, both great and small, is necessary to their existence.

Our statement as to the situation of affairs, placed as they now are under military administration, after all these years of Government, may be thus recapitulated.

In the first place, there is an aristocratic minority, oppressive to the masses, and hostile to the French, demanding a share in the conduct of affairs, and threatening that unless their wishes are gratified, they will raise up the lower classes in a series of revolts. The Army is indifferent to the question, while the settlers clamorously demand the crushing of the obnoxious party; for it is the latter alone who

have suffered by the experience of the past—they alone who have a vital interest in the future.

Generals in command have openly attempted to excuse themselves in cases where the troops have been slow in putting down an insurrection, on the plea of having too much on their hands. Would this have been the case had the administration of the country been distinct from the special command of the Army?

Until in this respect Algeria becomes completely assimilated to France—until there shall be a complete severance of political and military power, as in the mother country—there remains little doubt but that Algeria will be badly governed, badly occupied, and badly administered. The only remedy for the political evils under which she now groans is the complete and total separation of the two powers, and any attempt at new combinations will only lead to new errors and inevitable mistakes.

Before bidding adieu to the reader, it may be well to put him "*au courant*" with our experience on the journey, in case he also should feel tempted to explore Algeria's beauties for himself.

In the first place, then, O reader, if you travel with mules, think twice before engaging a dragoman, unless you are lymphatic of temperament, or an invalid. In the latter case, I should advise you not to venture beyond Algiers, as you will undoubtedly do yourself more harm than good by braving the disagreeables of the expedition: in the former case, I should also advise you not to leave Algiers, as you will otherwise find yourself under the necessity of travelling through long days in sun and rain, for a forced period of sometimes seventeen hours. If, however, you are neither the one nor the other, but simply an Englishman ready to endure anything for the sake of excitement, or novelty, or perhaps instruction, I can say emphatically, make the journey by all means. You will mix with a people as yet almost unaltered by contact with Europeans; you will see

such varieties of scenic beauty as cannot but please your taste, however fastidious; and you will meet with such kindness from the colonists as you would seek in vain to excel, or even rival, elsewhere. You will encounter difficulties, no doubt, and sometimes personal danger, but nothing of sufficient importance to deter you from your purpose. A dragoman we consider to be a fatal mistake, as he adds considerably to the expense of the trip, without being of any material service. I speak only from our own experience. Everywhere we went we found at least one Arab among the mule-drivers who could speak French, and thus act as interpreter to the rest, and many a time we repented bitterly the presence of Hamoud, the "thorn in our side." Of course it is more expeditious to take horses than mules, but I very much doubt whether the latter is not the wiser plan. I am now presuming that the traveller has really come to see the country, and will not cavil at a few weeks more or less in point of time. If he is in a hurry, let him take the

diligence from Philipville to Biskra, and do the whole thing in ten days; but he may just as well stay at home, for all he will really learn of people or country—indeed, I think he would be a great deal wiser to buy this book (one copy for himself and several for his friends), and peruse it attentively, making an occasional note of approbation on the margin, and toasting his toes the while over his own library fire.

If horses are taken at all, they must be *bought* out and out, as they cannot be hired from place to place after the same fashion as mules. They are liable, too, to fall ill, and involve the addition of a groom to the escort. Arab horses obtained in the country are preferable for the purpose to those brought from home, as they are very strong, and extraordinarily sure-footed, besides being accustomed to hardship and exposure. The cost of a horse averages from £10 to £20. Whether it be a question of horses or mules, a European saddle and bridle are indispensable, for a couple of days on an Arab saddle is a

horror not to be dreamt of, or even whispered. The Arabs often demur at the use of any saddle but their own, but there is always some manner of getting rid of their objections, and if the worst come to the worst, it is simple enough to tie the Arab pack on the baggage-mule with the rest of the *impedimenta.*

I should advise the traveller to take as little with him as possible, though it is excessively unwise to be too lightly munitioned. Plenty of rugs and wraps, and one of Edmiston's India-rubber sheets should be provided, for many nights have to be passed on very damp ground in Arab huts, with all the winds and rains of heaven driving in by innumerable apertures. A round air-cushion, too, will not be found amiss either on long diligence journeys or for use when sleeping on the ground. No one who has not endured it would believe the agony of waking with a bruised hip-joint that has been digging into the earth all night? With a good waterproof sheet spread between yourself and the fleas, a good fur

coat, and a saddle for a pillow, it is astonishing what comfort may be attained; but great management is necessary to arrive at the desired end. A single mule will carry a large burden. We had each of us our little bag and bundles of rugs, and sometimes two boxes of provisions, and yet one beast was made to bear it all. It is most necessary to take provisions—tin cases of preserved meats, biscuits, candles, an etna, and a common metal pannikin or two, for in some places it is next to impossible to obtain anything at all. Two or three pots of Liebig's soup will be found a satisfactory addition to the store, as well as figs and raisins, and luxuries of the like innocent description. We each of us carried a flask of brandy and an opera-glass, besides a pistol and ammunition. A lantern was a great delight to us, giving us something to look at during the interminable diligence journeys during the night, besides sheltering our candle from the wind in the too airy Arab hovels. Tea should be taken, and also a quantity of insect-powder.

It is well to be provided with a variety of presents, for in some out-of-the-way places the bestowal of gifts is the only method of payment for eggs, milk, &c. Powder is the thing most prized by the natives, as it is forbidden to them by law; but it is a question whether in dangerous positions it is well thus, as it were, to place the weapon in the hands of the executioner. Perhaps tobacco or snuff is a more judicious gift, accompanied by a showy pouch or Brummagem knife.

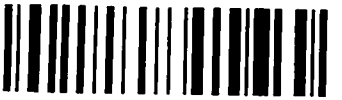
A small medicine chest should not be forgotten, well supplied with plaster and quinine, and other simple remedies. The Arabs, like all semi-barbarous nations, imagine that every European must be a doctor, and frequently come down on the traveller for some medicament to cure an imaginary disease. M. Jus, near Msila, told us that he had taken to applying coloured wafers to the afflicted spot, and that his success as a physician was most extraordinary!

If the traveller should desire to go "en grand

seigneur," he will have to embarrass himself with a tent and cushions, and other paraphernalia, and consequently an extra train of mules; but I think he will be wiser to submit to the hardships of Arab life, and mingle with the people as they are. We, at any rate, preferred doing so, grumbling dreadfully at times over our hard lot, but I fancy we should all be ready to follow the same plan again were our travels to recommence. Seven or eight mules, and ten or twelve men, were, I think, the extreme limits of our little caravan.

Farewell, reader! I have said my say, and many thanks for having followed me so far. If you, too, should have a mind to visit this highly-gifted country, and test the truth of my statements for yourself, I can only hope that you may enjoy your time as much as I did mine, and that your weather may be as propitious as was ours during four months' wandering through Algeria and Tunis. VALE!

THE END.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